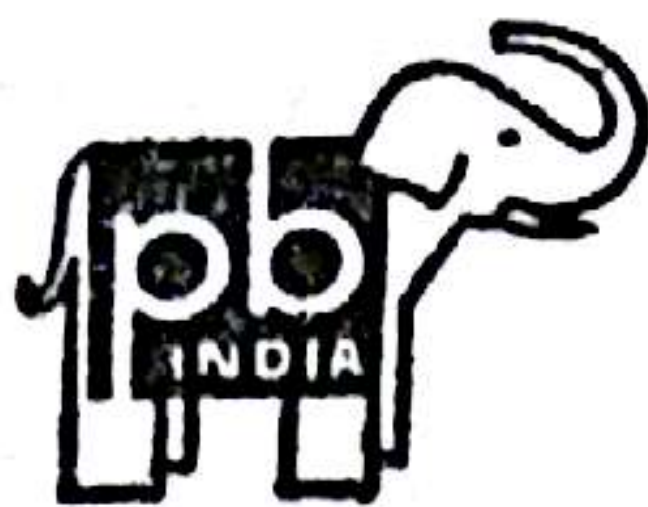


# The Guilty Men Of 1962





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# THE GUILTY MEN OF 1962

*by*

D. R. M A N K E K A R



THE TULSI SHAH ENTERPRISES

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*To my children*

ARUNA, AJIT, URMILA AND PURNIMA



## PREFACE

"MEN ASK why it happened. Though the battle's course has remained a mystery and the modern world knows less of it than of actions fought near the dawn of history, public curiosity about how the surprise was accomplished runs ahead of public interest in what came of it . . . .

"All Americans had some share in the mistakes which precipitated the winter battle with the Chinese, from the record of error, lessons may be drawn in time to our possible profit. . . .

"Part of the setting is here described . . . in the modest hope that if there is to be an end to unjust criticism, it will be made not by indifference but by that compassion which is born of better understanding."

S. A. MARSHALL, the eminent American military analyst and historian, opens his book, *The River and the Gauntlet*, with these noble sentiments. His book tells the story of the surprise and defeat inflicted on the us Eighth Army by the Chinese Communist forces in November 1950, in the Battle of the Chongchon River—a defeat that stunned the American people as much as the NEFA debacle of 1962 shocked the Indian people.

Agitated Americans wanted to know how and why it happened. Marshall was commissioned to write his book in order to answer the persistent questions asked by the American people over that decisive defeat.

Describing the action as "one of the major decisive battles of the present century, followed by the longest retreat in American history," Marshall observes: "In the hour of its defeat the Eighth Army was a wholly modern force technologically . . . .

"The Chinese Communist army was a peasant body composed, in the main, of illiterates. But they matured their battle plan and became victors on the field of the Chongchon because they had a decisive superiority in information."

Indeed, there is not the least doubt that superior intelligence enabled the Chinese to achieve the speedy and overwhelming success in their campaign on the NEFA border of India in 1962.

But in citing the passage from Marshall, my primary motive



is to underline the truism that unjust criticism can be ended by compassion born of better understanding, and not by indifference or concealment. It is in this spirit that I approach this task. But while keeping the tone and content of this volume constructive, it is also my duty not to compromise with truth.

With the Government's persistent and irrational refusal to publish the Henderson Brooks report even four years after it was submitted, on the unconvincing plea of public interest and security,—all the more so, after the publication of Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul's *The Untold Story*—the need for an objective study and analysis of what happened in NEFA in 1962, and why, becomes imperative.

In revealing certain detailed aspects of the 1962 campaign in NEFA and hitting back at the critics of his part in that campaign, Gen. Kaul has further whetted public appetite and revived people's curiosity over the humiliating reverses suffered by the Indian Army at the hands of the Chinese during that campaign.

It is definitely not the province, nor the intention, of this volume to cross swords with Gen. Kaul over the many controversial and contentious points he has made in his "Story." Indeed, I fully sympathize with Gen. Kaul when he hits out at his calumniators and fights for his reputation as a man and a soldier. He has every right to. But whether, in the process, he had also the right to besmirch the escutcheons of others, using the same tarbrush applied against him, of which he had complained, is another matter.

The personal attacks on Gen. J. N. Chaudhuri, in particular, are most regrettable, not only because they are questionable in taste and betray an ill-tempered animus, but also because many of the charges made against Gen. Chaudhuri are untenable.

That he is an expert on tanks is an established fact. That early in 1946, Chaudhuri was promoted to the post of Director of the Armoured Corps at the Headquarters of the Allied Land Forces in Singapore, over the heads of several British and Commonwealth officers, underlines Gen. Chaudhuri's professional eminence.

Altogether, one cannot help regretting that Gen. Kaul missed a great opportunity to produce a great book and present an invaluable, objective and analytical eye-witness



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account and assessment of the events of 1962 autumn for record and history—on the lines of the “Rommel Papers.”

In a democracy, the people have a right to know the why and wherefore of a national disaster. The Government is accountable to the people. Where the Government fails in its duty, a publicist may step in to fulfil that task.

This volume tries to present to the people an objective picture of the events of the autumn of 1962 on the northern frontier, set in a proper perspective, and help them to determine what were the elements and factors responsible for that disaster.

I have, inevitably, relied on Gen. Kaul's *The Untold Story*—apart from a series of discussions I had with him in 1965—to fill the gaps in my knowledge and understanding of the events of 1962 in NEFA. I take this opportunity to offer my thanks to him.

I should here acknowledge my debt to all those who generously gave of their time for discussions with me on a subject of common interest. It is not practicable to name here the many officials, Civilian and Military; politicians, Ministers and ex-Ministers; and experts who helped me to collect the material for this book. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to them all.

D. R. M.



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## P R O L O G U E

### WHEN THE ARMY WENT TO SEED

WHEN INDIA attained independence in 1947, the Indian Army underwent a major surgical operation. Following the country's partition, the Army too was cut in two. Simultaneously, the British element—which was in overwhelming majority in the officer-ranks of the Indian Army—was withdrawn, all at once. But the outgoing British officers' predictions that the Indian Army would fall apart without Britishers to command it, were belied in no time. The wishful myth was exploded. Indeed, the same jawans fought even better under Indian commanders and for a patriotic cause.

Even while it was still on the operation table, as it were, the Indian Army was called upon to discharge heart-rending duties in shepherding thousands of demented, uprooted refugees, many of them relatives, on the move to and from Pakistan. And while still in the thick of that task, it was rushed by air, at 24 hours' notice, to Kashmir to defend that State against the Pakistani invaders.

The Indian Army's performance in Kashmir was fully worthy of its glorious traditions. The Indian forces were plunged into action, hastily, in dribblets, ill-prepared and ill-equipped. They had no intelligence about the terrain or enemy movements. They had no supporting arms other than bare rifles. Fighting for the first time in snow-clad Himalayan heights, against odds, the jawans wrote a new, brilliant chapter in their annals.

Then followed the Hyderabad police action, which proved a four-day wonder, with the Nizam's Army surrendering to (then) Maj.-Gen. J. N. Chaudhuri and the Nizam acceding to the Indian Union.

Thus, when on January 1, 1949, a cease-fire was proclaimed in Kashmir, under the auspices of the UN, India had ticked off two top-priority problems on her desk—Kashmir and Hyderabad. With the Kashmir State's external security underpinned and fighting stopped, militarily, at any rate, that problem had been disposed of. With the Nizam's accession to India, the other major item went off the agenda.



Until the Chinese aggression of 1962 and the consequent threat of a second front posed by the Peking-Pindi collusion, we never considered Pakistan a serious military menace to our external security.

Action against the Portuguese in Goa, the only other pending question, was still far down the agenda, and the belief was strong that the Portuguese would have the wisdom to emulate the French and peacefully walk out of their tiny colonial outpost in Goa. The operations against the Naga rebels, though prolonged and ticklish, were considered an internal law-and-order exercise.

Having thus cleared the board, India turned to devote herself single-mindedly to the urgent tasks of economic development at home, and fashioned a foreign policy to suit that supreme objective. To our mind, non-alignment and peaceful co-existence was not only a wise policy in the present times, but a right one for the country.

From this point onwards, for the next decade, India crusaded for international peace and co-existence with evangelical zeal and fervour—for peace was indivisible and co-existence imperative in the nuclear age.

The Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950 did somewhat disturb New Delhi's equanimity. But we soon forged a *modus vivendi* with Peking and reconciled ourselves to the *fait accompli* on the Roof of the World—which, in any case, we were neither in a position nor in a mood to prevent.

Came the 1954 Sino-Indian Treaty on Tibet, better known as the Panchsheel Pact. It was the high-water-mark of India's foreign policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence. With that treaty we deluded ourselves into the belief that we had plugged the only source from which our external security could be threatened.

With international peace and friendship-for-all as the sheet anchor of our foreign policy, India's defence, now more than ever, got a back seat in the Government's and the country's calculations. Many a leader in Government and Opposition was convinced that to this country of Gandhi, Ashoka and Buddha, with no enemies in the world, a large standing army was immoral and an unwanted luxury.

This was the time when the Indian Army went to seed ;



when the country gave it the Cinderella treatment ; when the Government failed to give priority to its needs, and Parliament grudged funds to enable it to keep abreast of the other modern armies of the world in arms, training and equipment ; when officers of the armed forces turned sour and disgruntled, and the Army failed to attract the best of the country's youth to its officer ranks.

This was the period when our Defence Ministers were dummies or part-timers and our defence forces were deemed a conventional superfluity ; when the army brass remained unburnished and rifles uncleaned, when officers turned soft and developed a complex.

This was the time when Nehru had convinced himself and his country that wars had been banished from this nuclear age and therefore armies were mere outmoded status symbols of nations. Economic development of the country now became our new, jealous god, to the exclusion of everything else and neglect of the country's defences.

The leadership now emphasized and gloried in the Indian Army's new role for peace in the world. India sent out a contingent to Korea to supervise the military truce and the thorny problem of exchange of prisoners-of-war under the aegis of the UN. India became Chairman of the International Control Commission in Indo-China, with Canada and Poland as the other two members. Other Indian Army units and officers were lent to the UN to guard the peace in Gaza, the Congo and Cyprus.

This was the era of the Great Illusion. This was the era of guilt. As for the guilty men—the entire nation and its political and military leaders should, in varying degree, share the guilt.

The leadership was guilty of grave misjudgment and complacency, of misleading the country to the brink of a precipice while chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of its pet theories and idealistic romanticism.

The top brass was guilty of failure in its duty to the country when it shirked from giving right and frank counsel to the civilian Government. This was the period when the army headquarters was in the grip of a lotus-eater mental "slow-



motion" that came in the way of vigorous thinking and energetic action.

This fatal spell lasted till 1960, if not even later, when reluctantly, half-heartedly, under repeated and blatant Chinese provocations in Ladakh and elsewhere, the leadership turned its attention to the country's defences in the north. Even then, the conviction persisted that the "Chinese will never be so mean as to start a war with their 2,000-year old friends, the Indians."

In 1960, New Delhi woke up to the danger—but was not yet wide awake. An urgent programme of building up communications was taken in hand. More military posts were established in Ladakh and NEFA. Production in ordnance factories was stepped up. We began to negotiate abroad for the purchase of modern hardware.

But the sands were running out. When the balloon went up in October 1962, India found herself psychologically and militarily still unprepared.

And then, even as the nation and the army, under the impact of the enemy blows, staggered to their feet and geared themselves to fighting back, the crafty enemy proclaimed a cease-fire and withdrew, laying down conditions humiliating to India and her army.

All this is an agonizing story. It should be the nation's solemn resolve to prevent its recurrence. But the nation can do so only when it knows what exactly happened in NEFA in 1962 and why.



## OFFERING THE OTHER CHEEK

THE BRITISH had a clear-headed, integrated policy for India, designed to protect its frontiers and safeguard its interests. As they conceived it, in the pre-War era, this policy revolved round the theory of fostering a ring of buffer states on the periphery of India, firmly within the British sphere of influence.

Imperial Britain was the most powerful country of the times, whose frown nobody in the world dare ignore. Nevertheless, Britain took no chances and meticulously took every step to safeguard her Indian empire, whose defence outposts she deliberately laid so far out as Singapore in the east and Aden in the west.

An autonomous State, friendly to India and within the British sphere of influence, in the strategically vital Tibetan plateau, across India's northern border, was the very essence of that policy.

Though formally recognizing the suzerainty of China over Tibet, for all practical purposes, Britain directly dealt with the Lhasa Government and made every effort to bolster up its autonomous status and independent entity. Of course, such tactics were feasible at a time when the Chinese Government was too weak to resist them. Obviously, since then times have changed and today those methods will not work.

The guiding motive of the British Government in India in its dealings with Tibet in those days was to prevent, at any cost, the Tibetan plateau, which overlooks the Indian continent, from falling into the hands of any potential enemy—at first Czarist Russia, then Soviet Russia, later China, when the “slumbering giant awakes.”

There is evidence of constant concern felt on this score by the British rulers in India all along, and of the many counter-measures contemplated or taken to that end from time to time. One of these was the effort to get the vague Indo-Tibetan border stabilized and demarcated.

Throughout the history of the relations between British India and Tibet, the British went along on the assumption that



the Lhasa Government passionately desired continued British interest and presence in Tibet with a view to heading off a possible reimposition of the Chinese tutelage on them.

This assumption would appear to be well-founded, and held true until as recently as 1950 and 1959, when the Tibetan Government looked up, though in vain, to the Government of India for material help in defending itself against Chinese military conquest and occupation.

In 1914, the British Government of India decided it was time that the border between India and Tibet, and Tibet and China (it may be noted that the British presumed even to lay down the boundary between Tibet and China) should be delineated. To that end, a tripartite conference was convened in Simla, attended by the representatives of the three countries concerned. The conference fixed the boundaries between Tibet and India, and Tibet and China. All the three parties signed the document.

Later, however, the Chinese Government refused to ratify the agreement, even though its representative had attested his signature to it, on the ground that it was not satisfied with the delineation of the frontier between Tibet and China. As can be seen, China's refusal of ratification had nothing to do with the Indo-Tibetan frontier, as the Peking Government is now trying to make out.

This dividing line between India and Tibet, drawn at Simla in 1914, came to be known as the McMahon Line, after Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, the British representative who presided over the Simla convention.

Nothing much however was done to demarcate the Indo-Tibetan frontier on the ground for the next nearly thirty years. In 1943, with the international situation once again on the boil, the Government of India woke up and decided that in order to eliminate any cause of friction between India, on the one hand, and Tibet or China, on the other, action should be taken to stabilize the frontier.

It was decided to occupy certain points on the border permanently in order to counter Tibetan encroachments, which in the mean time had been multiplying on the NEFA border. Accordingly, early in 1944, a post was established in Walong in the Lohit valley, and two other posts were set up at Riga



and Karko in the Siang Valley. In the Tse la sub-agency, the strength of the permanent post at Rupa was raised to one platoon and, in addition, a permanent post of one platoon was established at Dirong Dzong.

Apart from setting up military posts, the Government of India also sought to extend its influence in the tribal areas through political and welfare measures. Political Agents toured the region, which was still largely unexplored and unmapped, and settled tribal disputes and provided medical assistance at the time of epidemics.

The Tibetan Government promptly protested against the establishment of the Indian posts and requested that the status quo be maintained on the interesting plea that failure to do so might tempt the Chinese Government to exploit to their advantage the friction on the McMahon Line between Tibet and India.

The British Government in India firmly rejected Tibet's protest and reaffirmed its right to maintain posts on the frontier. Further, in a communication to Lhasa on December 29, 1944, it maintained that it would act as it considered fit in the areas south of the Line, but would inform the Tibetan Government of any action it took near the frontier. It also denied any aggressive intentions towards Tibet, reaffirmed its goodwill towards Lhasa and reiterated its desire to assist that country.

The Tibetan Government reacted sharply to the Government of India's communication. The National Assembly at Lhasa passed a resolution expressing regret at the Government of India "taking over Tibetan territory" and demanding the immediate withdrawal of Indian troops from the Tse La and Walong areas.

Though there was little danger of any invasion of India from this direction at the time, the General Staff at the Army HQ, in New Delhi, held the view that India should make good her claim to administer the entire natural strategic frontier and provide more depth to the defence of northeast India.

The General Staff considered that an air attack from the east and northeast was always a possibility in any future wars and India should not forgo the right to have posts as far forward as possible to provide an adequate warning of attack.



As early as 1945-46, the Army HQ considered that the domination of Tibet by a potential hostile major power would constitute a direct threat to the security of India and that the Government of India was therefore vitally interested in maintaining friendly relations with Tibet and preserving for Tibet at least that measure of autonomy which she then enjoyed.

The Army HQ therefore laid down that the object of any military aid from India to Tibet should be to prevent a hostile power establishing itself in areas from which it could threaten India. In practice, this meant preventing the enemy from occupying those parts of Tibet from which an air attack and rocket missiles could be launched on India.

In this context, it is interesting to note that Lt.-Gen. Sir Francis Tuker, who spent most of his career in the Indian Army and retired as GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, on India attaining independence, stressed the same point in a paper he prepared on India's defence strategy :

"Looked at from an enemy's point of view and some years from now, the Tibetan plateau are the airfield areas from which to cover eastern India ; the bombardment group areas of Tibet are the main areas from which the further stepping forward of these groups can be undertaken in order to clear the way for the airborne assault and occupation of the UP, Bihar, and Bengal . . . . Thus it is in India's interest to prevent the military occupation by China of the Tibetan plateau. She must always be able to forestall it by her own occupation."\*

With the advent of Independence and the threat of Chinese "liberation" of Tibet closing in, there was much feverish activity in New Delhi. Primarily, this activity was actuated by the fear of Communist infiltration into India from Tibet through the many passes opening out into this country all along the lengthy Himalayan border.

Among the measures considered by New Delhi in order to bolster up the Tibetan Government in Lhasa were the setting up of a military mission in Lhasa ; increasing the strength of our armed escort at Gyantse from one company to one battalion; supply of arms to Tibet ; repairs to the Gyantse-Gangtok road ; training of the Tibetan army and education facilities for the families of prominent Tibetans.

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\* "*While Memory Serves*" by Lt. Gen. Sir Francis Tuker.



Even the possibility of occupying the Chumbi Valley, that dagger thrust into India along her north-eastern border, as a defensive measure, was envisaged in the event of threat to this country.

The proposal for the setting up of a military mission in Lhasa was rejected by the Government on political grounds. It also shied at the suggestion in favour of supplying arms to Tibet, and could not find the will to implement the proposal to raise the strength of our garrison at Gyantse—measures which the Dalai Lama's Government in Lhasa prayed for.

The process of letting down Tibet began in January 1950. On the first of that month, Chairman Mao Tse-tung proclaimed the "liberation of three million Tibetans from imperialist aggression" as a basic task of the People's Liberation Army of China.

The Government of India was one of the first to recognize the People's Republic of China—the Communist regime in Peking was proclaimed on October 1, 1949, and New Delhi announced its recognition on December 30, 1949.

In January 1950, the Government of India assured its goodwill for the Tibetan Government and its anxiety to help maintain Tibetan autonomy, but pleaded that the effectiveness of their help would largely depend on the maintenance of friendly relations between India and China. The Government of India added that it was clear that the new Chinese Government would raise the Tibetan question sooner or later and when they did, the Government of India would help Tibet diplomatically.

The Tibetan Government was also informed that its requests for arms and ammunition "for reasonable requirements of her army would receive a sympathetic consideration of the Government of India in the future, as in the past".

On August 13, 1950, the Government of India represented to the Government of China that they were concerned at the possibility of unsettled conditions across their border, and strongly urged that the Sino-Tibetan relations should be stabilized through peaceful negotiations. In response, the Government of China declared their willingness to solve the problem of Tibet by peaceful and friendly measures and expressed their desire to "stabilize the China-India border."



On October 7, 1950, the Chinese troops marched into Tibet. Thereupon, New Delhi drew Peking's attention to the harmful effects of resorting to military action as it would hinder the admission of the People's Government of China to the UN and lead to unrest and disturbances on India's borders.

Peking's response to the representation was an angry allegation against the Government of India "as having been affected by foreign influences hostile to China in Tibet".

The Government of India expressed surprise at the Chinese charge and stated that they only wished for a peaceful settlement of the problem.

On December 7, 1950, speaking in Parliament, Nehru registered a mild protest against the developments in Tibet and Chinese allegations against India.

The Prime Minister stated :

"It is not right for any country to talk about its sovereignty or suzerainty over an area outside its own immediate range. That is to say, since Tibet is not the same as China, it should ultimately be the wishes of the people of Tibet that should prevail, and not any legal or constitutional arguments. That I think is a valid point. Whether the people of Tibet are strong enough to assert their rights or not is another matter. Whether we are strong enough or any other country is strong enough to see that this is done is also another matter. If it is a right and proper thing to say, and I see no difficulty in saying to the Chinese Government, that whether they have suzerainty over Tibet or sovereignty over Tibet, surely, according to any principles, the principles they proclaim and the principles I uphold, the last voice in regard to Tibet should be the voice of the people of Tibet and of nobody else."

That was the farthest that the Government of India went to demonstrate its disapproval of the outrageous Chinese action in Tibet.

Thereafter opened a phase of assiduous courting and wooing of Peking by New Delhi, calculated to win a friend, if not to influence him.

As early as September 19, 1950, the Indian Delegation to the General Assembly of the UN urged that the People's Government should represent China in the UN. In February, next year, in the General Assembly of the UN, India



voted against a resolution branding the People's Republic of China as an aggressor in Korea.

When a Peace Treaty with Japan was signed at San Francisco by 49 nations, in the September of that year, India declined to attend the conference because, among other reasons, China was not a party to it. In November, India again urged the representation of China by the People's Government in the UN, which ritual her delegation was to repeat year after year at the UN until 1958.

In May 1953, Nehru declared that the resolution introduced by India in the UN on Korea was intended to represent the viewpoint of China on the question of the prisoners of the Korean War—a resolution which was passed by an overwhelming majority. And when in June, a Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission was set up to ensure the proper implementation of the resolution of the UN, India accepted its chairmanship.

In December 1953, the Government of India initiated negotiations at Peking on the relations between India and Tibet, which step it took in the hope that by settling all outstanding issues which had been inherited from the past, the relations of friendship and co-operation between the two countries would be greatly strengthened.

When another country raised the human rights issue over Tibet at the UN, Krishna Menon supported the line that since Peking was not a member of the UN it could not be held to account for the suppression of human rights in Tibet ! Menon did not think that a UN resolution on Tibet could "help the cause of peace." The Government of India took the stand that they had no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of China or Tibet, and that the issue had become clouded in cold war !

Judging from the results, it is clear that India's effort failed to move the People's Government of China, which went ahead relentlessly with its chalked-out programme of "rectification" of boundaries at India's expense. For the immediate next few years however, after the strain of the Korean War, it suited China to lie low and talk of peace all round. And so it smothered the dragon's hisses and cooed like a dove of peace.



On April 29, 1954, China joined with India to sign the famous Panchsheel Agreement—an Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet and India. With it, New Delhi washed its hands off Tibet once for all.

The Government of India now relinquished all extra-territorial rights and privileges in Tibet which were inherited by New Delhi from the British Government and recognized that Tibet was a region of China. The Agreement specified trade agencies, markets and pilgrim routes and laid down regulations for trade and intercourse across the common border.

New Delhi further agreed to withdraw Indian military escorts stationed at Yatung and Gyantse and to transfer the post, telegraph and telephone services and rest-houses belonging to the Government of India in Tibet to the Government of China.

On October 29, 1954, the Indian garrisons in Yatung and Gyantse were withdrawn.

In return for this gesture of goodwill, and much more, Peking subscribed to the famous Five Principles, adumbrated in the Agreement.

These Five Principles were : (1) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty ; (2) mutual non-aggression ; (3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs ; (4) equality and mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful co-existence.

In 1955, Nehru personally chaperoned Chou En-lai to the Bandung Conference and introduced him to the assembled African and Asian dignitaries. The Sino-Indian honeymoon was now in full swing.

But the fact remained that India was now confronted with a radically new and dangerous situation on its northern border, which even its former powerful British rulers dreaded and strove hard to avert for a century.

The buffer had been eliminated. India was now rubbing shoulders along its border with the most powerful, capricious, militant neighbour. The strategically vital Tibetan plateau was actually under the occupation of a potential enemy who hardly made any secret of his intentions towards his neighbours.



From the day the Chinese Communists established themselves in Peking, two major objectives dominated their thinking and policies. These were : (1) The attainment of an independent great-power status, and (2) the filling out of China's territorial boundaries in Taiwan and Tibet. The conquest of Taiwan might not be quite so easy, thanks to the guard mounted by the U.S. around it, but Tibet could be gobbled up for the asking.

Implicit in their determination to re-assert their sovereignty over Tibet was the Chinese demand for a "rectification" of the Indo-Tibetan boundaries.

These objectives could only be realized if China became militarily strong. Towards that end, therefore, the Communist regime in Peking bent its energies from the outset.

"Power grows out of the barrel of a gun," Mao Tse-tung, their supreme prophet, had pronounced. And Mao believed, "War is the highest form of struggle... for settling contradictions between classes, between nations, between states or between political groups at a given stage of their development."

Peking, thus, went all out to build up the largest ever army, and at tremendous sacrifice to the nation, devoted its scientific skills and finances to developing its nuclear capability.

Pitted against such crass *realpolitik* was Nehru's brittle, naive "undergrad" idealism ; an innocent faith in India's official motto "Satyameva Jayate" ("Truth alone triumphs"), a philosophy which eschewed war as uncivilized and outmoded in the current nuclear era.

A typical example of this "Sermon-on-the-Mount" outlook was Nehru's statement in the Lok Sabha on April 1, 1961, made in the course of his speech on the Report of the India-China Officials' delegation :

"The fact that we hold on to a right position, without giving in, is a sign of our strength and produces a certain continuing result. I do not rule out—although it may seem unlikely today—that the strength and correctness of our position may dawn on the Chinese Government's mind. If so, I am going to try my best and see that it is appreciated by them and they realize that they have done a wrong thing from which they should withdraw."



Here was indeed an instance of "spiritual force," or the alchemy of the spirit, in operation against cynical international politics—a naive posture that fails to see a patent fact, namely, that nations' international stances are predetermined and based on self-interest and therefore their hearts, made of steel, cannot be converted by spiritual force or the rights and wrongs of a case.

It is readily conceded that the "big stick" diplomacy which the British imperialists practised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, could never be repeated in the post-War era. Nor was it within the means of India in 1950 or 1959 to intervene in Tibet to prevent the Chinese aggression.

A democratic India could never compete in a military race with a Communist totalitarian regime that has preferred guns to butter and converted an entire nation into an armed camp.

According to reliable reports, the Chinese have practically militarised their entire Himalayan border region. By 1962, hundreds of thousands of soldiers were fully maintained all along the border. The whole of south Tibet was readied as a formidable base, obviously for the purpose of military adventures, since such elaborate measures were not needed to police Tibet and no attack from the south was reasonably expected.

At enormous expense in lives and materials, strategic roads have been constructed, many of them usable even during winter months. Airfields have been built. Vast numbers of year-round check-posts have been established in a most inhospitable territory. A network of communications has been created.

The Chinese military strength in Tibet alone is estimated at 2,00,000 men comprising 15 divisions. The Chinese are reported to have steadily expanded their network of air bases, particularly in and around Lhasa, and they have put in new radar installations.\*

China's People's Liberation Army has a total strength of over 25,00,000 men in active service in the ground, naval and air forces. The ground forces include over 150 divisions

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\* Harrison K. Salisbury in the *New York Times*, August 18, 1966.



of 10,000 to 12,000 men each, organized along lines similar to those of the Soviet Army.

In addition, they have over half a million troops in public security units, which are responsible for frontier duties and internal security, plus a huge militia organization running into tens of millions. The system of nationwide conscription was introduced in that country in 1955, under which all men are liable for military service at the age of 18.

In contrast, India's total standing army (i.e., excluding the airforce and navy) is estimated to be 10 lakh men, which is split up between the Chinese and Pakistani fronts.

What effective course of action could India have, then, taken to safeguard her frontier against a hostile Chinese-dominated Tibet?

Firstly, in the face of tell-tale evidence of China's evil intentions towards India almost from the outset, that India should have recklessly dropped its guard and blindly reposed faith in the Chinese protestations of friendship and peace, was a grave blunder. From that blunder flowed all the troubles that India had had to face since 1959, at any rate.

The smug, naive "bhai-bhai" mentality that stemmed from wilful blindness, stood in the way of India utilizing an eleven-year-long warning to prepare herself to meet the Chinese menace.

It could however be claimed that it was not so much that India was not alerted by the developments in Tibet in 1950 and thereafter; what went wrong was Nehru's abject reliance on diplomacy—the starry-eyed Nehru brand of it—to counter the danger from China, to the neglect of the conventional instrument of policy, namely, the armed forces.

Nehru had been carried away by his own hot-gossiping philosophy of the 'fifties, which assumed that in the present age, war had ceased to be an instrument of policy and its place had been taken by personal diplomacy and the conciliation machinery provided by the UN.



## THE MAPMANSHIP PHASE

THE STORY BEGINS much earlier. Even as they were signing the much-bruited Panchsheel Agreement—with all its protestations of peaceful co-existence and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity—Peking had already launched on the preliminary phase of its programme of "rectification of unequal treaties." They would not let the grass grow under their feet.

It took the form of cartographic aggression, also called the game of mapmanship. Chinese maps, put in circulation, showed as Chinese many parts of Indian territory along the 2,600-mile Indo-Tibetan frontier.

When, during his visit to Peking in 1954, Nehru raised the issue with Premier Chou En-lai, the latter assured him that the maps were merely reproductions of the old Kuo-mintang maps and that the present Government had not had the time to revise them.

Indeed, Chou reinforced Nehru's view that the border issue was minor ; that the territories in question were largely uninhabited and of such nature that any discrepancies could be settled by friendly arrangement.

But in 1956, the Chinese issued new maps which, while reiterating the earlier claims, also showed as Chinese certain parts of Indian territory in Ladakh, seized by Peking, in the meantime. That year, when Chou came to New Delhi, Nehru again discussed with him the matter of wrong maps.

The Chinese Premier now said that though he objected to McMahon Line imposed on China by British imperialists, he had accepted the line as the border between China and Burma and intended to accept it in the case of India too.

All this while, the Chinese deflected attention from themselves by accusing India of occupying Chinese territory south of the "illegal" McMahon Line on the eastern sector of the frontier, of encroaching upon Chinese territory in the middle sector and even of penetrating into Chinese territory in the Western sector.

The Chinese maps remained unrectified and were kept in



circulation. Peking, far from amending the maps, reinforced their cartographic claims with action on the ground.

In a communication to Peking, Nehru asked in surprise that if China had any doubts about the border, why had she failed to raise the question during the negotiations for the Treaty of 1954. In reply, Chou dropped the mask and bluntly stated that the issue was not raised during the negotiations in 1954 for the simple reason that "conditions were not yet ripe" for the settlement of the border.

In that letter, Chou asserted that the Sino-Indian boundary had never been formally delimited and that historically no treaty or agreement on the subject had ever been concluded between the Chinese and Indian Governments.

"The latest case concerns an area in the southern part of China's Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region, which has always been under Chinese jurisdiction," insisted Chou. "Patrol duties have continually been carried out in that area by the border guards of the Chinese Government. And the Sinkiang-Tibet highway built by our country in 1956 runs through that area."

Then the letter conceded that it was true that the border question was not raised in 1954 during the negotiations for the Indo-Tibetan Agreement. "This was because conditions were not yet ripe for its settlement and the Chinese side, on its part, had had no time to study the question."

The letter however ended on a conciliatory note. Even though Peking refused to recognize the McMahon Line, Chou said, the Chinese Government "found it necessary to take a more or less realistic attitude towards the McMahon Line" and could not but act "with prudence, and needs time to deal with this matter.... We believe that on account of friendly relations between China and India, a friendly settlement can eventually be found for this section (McMahon Line) of the boundary line."

On March 17, 1959, following the suppression of the Tibetan rebellion, the Dalai Lama, with a party of eight, fled Lhasa. On the evening of March 31, the party crossed the Tibetan border into India in the Towang sector of the Kameng Sub-division of NEFA and was received by the assistant Political Officer of the Sub-division. The Dalai Lama was given



asylum in India. That constituted the turning-point in the Sino-Indian relations.

Peking expressed its grave displeasure at the asylum and warm reception the Dalai Lama got in India. The Chinese Government protested to New Delhi against strong adverse reaction in the Indian press and among the people against the outrageous conduct of the Chinese in Lhasa.

The Government of India replied that India was a free, democratic country, where freedom of expression prevailed. "In India unlike China, the law recognizes many parties and gives protection to the expression of differing opinions," stated New Delhi's note to Peking.

The Chinese Government also accused New Delhi of giving official reception to the Dalai Lama at the frontier and of even drafting the god-king's press statements for him and distributing them to the correspondents.

There was no doubt, however, that both the Government and the people of India were deeply stirred by the events in Tibet and public opinion had turned sharply against China—a fact that stuck out a mile.

The Dalai Lama added fuel to the fire. At a press conference held at Mussoorie on June 20, 1959, he declared that Tibet was a sovereign State when it signed the 1950 Treaty with China. He insisted that that treaty was signed "between two sovereign and independent Governments."

The god-king even staked a claim for a Greater Tibet by demanding of China the return of the Amdo and Kham regions which Peking had long ago annexed and incorporated into China.

He further added, "Wherever I and my Ministers are, the Tibetan people will recognize us as their Government." He then appealed to India to extend to Tibet the same sympathy and support that she had offered to Algeria and other Afro-Asian countries in their struggle for freedom.

On September 8, 1959, for the first time, Chou En-lai in a letter to Nehru, formally claimed area in India which had till then been merely included in the Chinese maps—some 50,000 square miles, equal in size to that of England. Hitherto, Chou was soothingly disowning the maps as having been issued by the Kuomintang regime.



In this letter, Chou made it clear, "the Chinese Government absolutely does not recognize the so-called McMahon Line." He further added, "In Your Excellency's letter, you also referred to the boundary between China and Sikkim. Like the boundary between China and Bhutan, this question does not fall within the scope of our present discussion." Thereby, China gave notice to India that she did not recognize India's special relationship with the two Himalayan States.

Meanwhile, Peking had already stepped out of mapmanship into the field of action. It was a systematic, cold blooded process of escalation.

As early as September 1953, there was an incident of Chinese intrusion on the Tibet-Tehri-Gahrwal border, following which the UP Government strengthened their check-post at Nelang, in Tehri-Gahrwal.

In July 1954—almost simultaneously with the signing of the Panchsheel pact—the Chinese protested to New Delhi about the presence of Indian troops in Barahoti, in another sector of the Tibet-UP border. This was the first time India had heard of the Chinese claim to Barahoti.

A Government of India communique however sought to play down the incident and stated that Barahoti covered two square miles of territory at an altitude of over 16,000 ft. and it had no strategic or other importance. "The Indo-Tibetan border is well-defined. The question is merely one of fact, namely whether the small area . . . lies north or south of the border areas."

The following June, Chinese troops camped in the Barahoti plain, and in September 1955, they proceeded ten miles south of the Niti Pass to Damzan.

In September 1956, tension erupted in the Shipki La area, on the Himachal Pradesh-Tibetan border, following exchange of fire between Indian and Chinese police in that region. In an aide memoire, dated September 24, the Indian Government informed the Chinese Government that the Border Security Force had been directed "on no account to retire from their position or to permit the Chinese personnel to go beyond where they are even if this involves a clash" and warned that if China did not desist from such activities "there might be



an unfortunate clash on our borders." But subsequent response by New Delhi to similar activities by Peking belied that posture of firmness.

There followed what the Prime Minister described as "some petty intrusions" in the Indian border areas by some platoon or other of the Chinese troops. "This was nothing extraordinary," Nehru told the Lok Sabha, on August 28, 1959, "because there is no demarcation at all and parties may some times cross over. We drew the attention of the Chinese Government in 1957-58 to this, and they withdrew. There the matter ended."

In October 1957, the Chinese intruded in the NEFA region for the first time when they entered Walong, in the Lohit Frontier Division. After 1959, following the Dalai Lama's flight to India, the Chinese dropped the mask and intensified their overt and covert activity in both the western and the eastern sectors, and particularly in the Kameng area of the NEFA border, which was the route the Dalai Lama had taken to cross into India.

Now, the Tibetan exodus across the Indian border was taken advantage of by the Chinese to smuggle their espionage agents by the score, who mixed themselves with the fleeing Tibetan refugees. These agents, racially indistinguishable from the local people on the Indian side of the border, spread themselves all over NEFA and Assam. They came disguised as Tibetan shepherds and labourers and settled around Gauhati, Dibrugahr and Silchar. With the help of pro-Chinese Indian Communists, they organized extensive Chinese spy-rings in these areas.

In a small hamlet, north of Bomdi la, a Chinese operated a tea-stall along the new road built during the two years preceding the Chinese invasion, connecting Towang with Missimari, near Tezpur, the administrative and military headquarters of NEFA. At Chaku village, south of Bomdi la, a Chinese agent operated a wireless set for nearly 18 months before being detected.

There had been 25 known air violations by Chinese aircraft over NEFA in the months immediately preceding the 1962 attack, obviously on aerial recce and photo missions.

The Indian security staff had notified the local authorities



long ago about the intensification of Chinese espionage in the region. They complained that the powers-that-be did not pay heed to their warnings.

In June, the Chinese Government protested against an alleged intrusion by Indian troops into Chinese territory near Migyitun along the Tibetan-NEFA border. They alleged that our troops entered into some kind of collusion with the Tibetan rebel forces carrying on illegal activities against the People's Government of China.

New Delhi totally denied the allegation and expressed surprise that the Chinese Government should give credence to those allegations. Indian troops remained where they were in the area.

In July, the Government of India had to protest to Peking against the difficulties placed in the way of the functioning of Indian officials in Tibet as also of Indian traders and pilgrims.

On the 28th of that month, an Indian patrol of six men was arrested by a Chinese party 20 miles southeast of Tokung Se and Yula Se in Ladakh and taken to their camp at Spanggur and subsequently to Rudok, and later released at Spanggur on August 18.

In August, the Chinese established an observation-cum-listening post on the hills overlooking our airfield at Chushul. On the 27th of that month, the Chinese hoisted their flag near Rezang la, 22 miles south of Spanggur and three miles within our border.

The same month, the Western Command reported that in southern Ladakh the Chinese were in Gardzong in more than a battalion strength and that a three-tonner road was under construction connecting up with Tashigong in Tibet.

In the mean time, on the NEFA front, on August 7, an armed Chinese patrol, 200 strong, violated our border at Khinzemanc. The Indian force at the spot requested the Chinese detachment to push back. In reply, the 200 Chinese literally and physically pushed back our patrol of a dozen men to a bridge at Drokung Samba. There was no firing. The Chinese withdrew later and our forces re-established themselves.

Then, the Chinese patrol arrived again and demanded the immediate withdrawal of our picket and the lowering of our flag. This request was refused. There was some



attempt by the Chinese forces to outflank our men, but our men remained there, and nothing further happened, Nehru told the Lok Sabha.

Towards the end of the month, a strong Chinese detachment crossed into our territory in the Subansiri Frontier Division, near Longju, south of Migyitun and opened fire. The Chinese detachment, 200 to 300 strong, surrounded our patrol of twelve men of the Assam Rifles and arrested the lot. Eight of the men escaped and returned to our post in Longju.

Later, the Chinese came again and encircled our main post, comprising some 30 men. There was firing for a considerable time. Ultimately, under overwhelming pressure, the Indian unit had to withdraw from Longju.

The Government of India, according to form, protested to the Chinese Government against the action of their troops in Longju. Following this incident, however, the Government of India placed the border area of NEFA directly under Army control.

By September, in Ladakh, the Chinese moved in further, and posted a company at Chushul-Rezang la, a company and a battalion HQ at Shingshand and another company at Khurnak Fort-Mandal, just south of Dumboguru. Before long, the Chinese shifted their camp from the northern bank of Spanggur Lake to its southern bank at Tula, 9 miles east of Chushul.

Thus, we now find the tempo of activity increasing and the Chinese leap-frogging into Indian territory.

On October 20, Chinese military forces advanced forty miles into Indian territory in the Chang Chenmo valley in southern Ladakh. Encountering an Indian patrol near the Kongka Pass, they opened fire, killing nine Indians. Ten other members of the Indian party were taken into captivity and subjected to harsh treatment. Among them was the brave officer, Karam Singh, who led the police party.

Following this clash, the responsibility for the security of the Ladakh region was also transferred directly to the Army, for the first time.

Nevertheless, on November 16, New Delhi, still anxious to find a peaceful settlement, proposed as an interim measure that in the Ladakh area the Government of India would



withdraw their troops to the line which China claimed as her boundary and the Chinese troops should withdraw behind the traditional boundary alignment shown on the Indian maps. The idea behind the proposal was to eliminate the risk of border clashes.

Peking promptly rejected the proposal. Instead, Chinese troops advanced further west and south of the Aksai Chin area and began building more roads.

In February 1960, our Intelligence reported that the Chinese had improved their road from Lanak la to Kongka la to take heavy vehicles and that in the north, their track linking up Sinkiang-Qiziljilga-Shinglung had been developed into a fair-weather one to take light vehicles.

In April, for a brief week, the tussle was shifted to the diplomatic sphere, when Chou En-lai arrived in New Delhi for talks with Nehru. But nothing came of the talks, and the Chinese resumed the game of "catch-as-catch-can" on the Indo-Tibetan border with renewed zest.

On the NEFA front, in June, a large Chinese party moved into Taktsang Gompa, the monastery village in the Towang area, five miles within Indian territory, in the Kameng sector. New Delhi lodged a protest.

The Government of India now notified to the Government of China 52 instances of violation of Indian airspace since March 1960, "by aircraft flying from Tibet." Between December 1950 and September 1960, 102 air violations by Chinese aircraft had been noted.

In September 1960, the Chinese turned in a new direction, for the first time sending across an armed patrol into Sikkim, near the Jelep Pass.

The following year, not a month passed without a Chinese intrusion or encroachment either in Ladakh or in the NEFA region. The incidents were now, more often than not, accompanied by firing.

On February 14, 1961, the Government of India published the report of the officials of the two sides on the boundary issue. The report made clear, on the basis of vast evidence, that the traditional, delimited boundary between the two countries was as shown by India and that China had made unwarranted claims to about 50,000 square miles of this.



The Government of China for quite a while did not even acknowledge the existence of this report. It was not until May 1962 that they published a garbled and truncated version of the Chinese section of the report.

On April 20, Chinese personnel once again crossed into Sikkim near the Jelep Pass. In May, the Chinese intruded into Indian territory near Chushul in the Western Sector. In July, a Chinese patrol crossed the frontier in the Kameng sector of NEFA and penetrated one mile west of Chemokarpola.

R. K. Nehru, Secretary-General, External Affairs Ministry, passing through Peking, in mid-July, on his way back to New Delhi from Mongolia, met the Chinese leaders to ascertain whether any progress could be made on the basis of the report of the officials. He found little encouragement for his mission in the Chinese capital. Instead, the following month, the Chinese encroached still farther into Indian territory in Ladakh by establishing three new check-posts at Point  $78^{\circ} 12' E$ ,  $35^{\circ} 19' N$ , at Nyagzu and near Dambuguru, and by constructing new roads to link up these posts with rear bases.

In September, the Chinese crossed into Sikkim for the third time, again near the Jelep Pass.

The Government of India now formally drew the attention of the Government of China to their numerous incursions across the boundary, continued unlawful occupation of a large part of Indian territory and construction of new roads and check-posts. The Note urged Peking to withdraw from Indian territory and desist from aggressive activities.

As the year 1962 dawned, Chinese intrusions multiplied along the 2,600-mile long Indo-Tibetan frontier.

In January, a Chinese patrol advanced twelve miles forward from their check-post at Point  $78^{\circ} 12' E$ ,  $35^{\circ} 19' N$ , in Ladakh, while in NEFA some Chinese civil and military officials crossed the border near Longju and proceeded to Roy village, half a mile within India, in the Subansiri Frontier Division.

On February 22, New Delhi lodged a protest to Peking against their advance patrolling in Ladakh. This was followed by another protest to China against the establishment of a military post six miles west of Sumdo, also in Ladakh.



Nevertheless, right through April and May, the Chinese kept up advance-patrolling in the Chip Chap area of Ladakh.

Indeed, on April 30, the Government of China announced that they had ordered patrolling in the whole sector from the Karakorum Pass to the Kongka Pass and demanded that India withdraw two of her posts which were situated well within her own territory—reminiscent of the wolf's demands of the lamb down the stream in the fable. Peking threatened that if the Government of India did not comply, the Government of China would resume patrolling along the entire boundary.

Three days later, the Governments of China and Pakistan announced agreement to enter into negotiations to locate and align the portion of the India-China boundary west of the Karakorum Pass, in Kashmiri territory under Pakistan's unlawful occupation. New Delhi duly drew the attention of Peking that the sovereignty over the entire State of Jammu and Kashmir vested solely in the Indian Union, and that any agreements reached with Pakistan regarding any sector of the boundary of Kashmir would have no legal validity.

The same month, that is, in May, the Chinese set up a new post in Indian territory ten miles southeast of Spanggur, in Ladakh.

The Government of India lodged yet another, the fourth, protest against the aggressive patrolling by Chinese troops in the Chip Chap area of Ladakh and renewed their proposal that Indian and Chinese forces in the Western Sector should withdraw behind the alignment claimed by China and the traditional Indian alignment respectively.

New Delhi also declared India's willingness, in the interest of a peaceful settlement, to permit the use of the Aksai Chin road by Chinese civilian traffic.

The Government of India's fifth protest of the year—and second of the month—was against the establishment of a new post near Spanggur.

On June 2, the Panchsheel Agreement of 1954 between India and China lapsed—it had already been a dead-letter. The Government of China had violated it through harassment of Indian pilgrims, traders and nationals in Tibet and by



aggression into Indian territory.

In the next two months, four more Indian protests followed against the setting up by China of new posts and construction of new roads in the Ladakh region—bringing up the tally of New Delhi's protests for the first seven months of 1962 to nine.



### III

#### THE NUB OF THE PROBLEM

EARLY IN 1955, the Chinese started constructing a highway through the Indian territory of Aksai Chin in Ladakh. It provided a strategic link to the Chinese province of Sinkiang in Central Asia with Tibet.

The Indian Military Attache at Peking, Brigadier S. S. Mallick, made a first reference to the development in a routine report to his Government as early as November 1955. No one in New Delhi took any particular notice of it.

Five months later, in a special report to New Delhi, the Military Attache drew pointed attention to the construction of the strategic highway through our territory in Aksai Chin.

According to Brigadier Mallick, the then Indian Ambassador in Peking, R. K. Nehru was reluctant to forward the report to the External Affairs Ministry in New Delhi, lest the Prime Minister might disapprove of it !

After considerable pressure, the Ambassador was prevailed upon to dispatch the report to the Director, China Division, E. A. Ministry. Simultaneously, the Military Attache also sent a copy of the report to the Army HQ. The latter viewed the development with great concern, and took up the matter with the E. A. Ministry. Cables began to fly between New Delhi and the Indian Embassy in Peking.

When at the end of 1957, the Chinese completed the construction of their highway through Aksai Chin, the Peking Government even invited the Indian Ambassador and his Military Attache to be present at the ceremony formally opening the road. The idea behind the invitation was to produce a *fait accompli* by getting the Indian diplomatic representatives to be personally present and witness the opening of the road. Both the Ambassador and the Military Attache however declined to attend the function.

In 1956, an Indian military delegation led by Gen. J. N. Chaudhuri visited China, and were taken around the country on a strictly conducted tour. Chaudhuri however expressed a special desire to visit the Chinese MIG-17 aircraft factory. The hosts somewhat reluctantly agreed to take the Indian



military delegation to the factory on the strict condition that nothing of their impressions of the visit to the factory should be mentioned to the then British Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Navy at New Delhi. On the other hand, when a Chinese military delegation toured India in 1958, their open-hearted Indian hosts had no secrets to keep from their guests who were feted and taken round important military installations in the country.

It was not until August 28, 1959, that Nehru gave officially any information about the Chinese road built on our soil in Aksai Chin, in Ladakh, even though the Indian press had, for quite a while, been publishing reports about it. The statement was practically coaxed out of the Prime Minister's lips in the Lok Sabha after a series of questions on the subject of Chinese incursions in Ladakh.

N. G. Goray had asked whether the Chinese had built a road across the territory of Ladakh joining Gartok with Yarkand and whether this road had been there for more than a year.

The Prime Minister, replying in the affirmative, stated : "About a year or two ago, the Chinese had built a road from Gartok towards Yarkand, that is, Chinese Turkestan ; and the report was that this road passed through a corner of our northeastern Ladakhi territory. The House will appreciate that these areas are extraordinarily remote, almost inaccessible, and even if they can be approached, it takes weeks and weeks to march and get there.

"In that connection, a reconnaissance party was sent there. I cannot exactly say when, but I think it was a little over a year ago, some time last year. In fact, two parties were sent ; one of them did not return and the other returned."

A Member : "What happened to them ?"

The Prime Minister : "We waited for two or three weeks, and when it did not return, we suspected that it might have been apprehended or captured by the Chinese authorities on the border. So we addressed the Chinese authorities ; this was more than a year ago ; we addressed them about a month after the incident ; and they said some of our people had violated their border and come into their territory, and they had been apprehended, but because of their relations with



us, etc., they were going to release them, and they did release them afterwards, that is, after they had been with them about a month or so.

“That is concerning this road about which the Hon. Member was inquiring. In all this area, there is no actual demarcation. So far as we are concerned, our maps are clear that this is within the territory of the Union of India. It may be that some of the parts are not clearly demarcated. But, obviously, if there is any dispute over any particular area, that is a matter to be discussed . . . . This was the boundary of the old Kashmir State with Tibet and Chinese Turkistan. Nobody had marked it. But after some kind of broad surveys, the then Government had laid down that border which we have been accepting and acknowledging.”

N. G. Goray : “Does it mean that in parts of our country which are inaccessible, any nation can come and build roads and camps? We just send our parties, they apprehend the parties and, because of our good relations, they release them. Is that all? The road remains there, the occupation remains there and we do not do anything about it?”

The Prime Minister : “I do not know if the Hon. Member expects me to reply to that. There are two or three types of cases here. These are border and frontier questions. In regard to some parts of the border, there can be no doubt from any side that it is our border. If anybody violates it, then it is a challenge to us.

“There are other parts regarding which it is rather difficult to say where the immediate border is, although broadly it may be known. But it is very difficult even in a map to indicate it ; if a big line is drawn, that line itself covers three or four miles, one might say, in a major map.

“Then there are parts still where there has been no demarcation in the past. Nobody was interested in that area. Therefore, it is a matter now for consideration of the data, etc., by the two parties concerned, and a decision will be taken in a way that is normal when there is some kind of a frontier dispute. In this particular matter, we have been carrying on correspondence and suggesting that it should be considered by the two Governments.”

In another statement, this time in the Rajya Sabha, three



days later, Nehru gave a more coherent account of what happened in Aksai Chin.

The Yehcheng-Gartok Road, also called the Sinkiang-Tibet Highway, was completed in September 1957. The following summer (1958), two reconnaissance parties were sent out to the Aksai Chin area to find out the alignment of the newly-built road in question and to check up whether it intruded into Indian territory.

One of the parties was captured by the Chinese. The other party returned and reported that the road entered Indian territory in the south near Sarigh Jilganang Lake and ran northwest leaving Indian territory near Haji Langar, in the northwest corner of Ladakh.

In reply to the Indian representation, the Chinese Government, on November 1, 1958, notified the release of the party and claimed that the road ran through Chinese territory.

A note expressing our surprise at the Chinese contention, presented to Peking on November 8, remained unanswered, despite subsequent reminders.

The Aksai Chin area has a general elevation of over 17,000 feet. The entire Ladakh area, including Aksai Chin, became a part of the Jammu and Kashmir State as a result of a treaty signed in 1842 on behalf of Maharaja Gulabh Singh, on the one side, and the Lama Gurusahib of Lhasa (the name written in the Agreement quoted by the Prime Minister) and the representative of the Emperor of China, on the other.

Ever since, this area has been a part of the Jammu and Kashmir State. Various attempts at demarcating the boundary between the Jammu and Kashmir State and Tibet were made subsequently by British officers. The Chinese Government were asked to send their representatives to co-operate in this work. They did not take part. The Chinese Commissioner, however, stated on January 13, 1847, as follows :

"I beg to observe that the borders of these territories have been sufficiently and distinctly fixed so that it would be best to adhere to this ancient arrangement, and it will prove far more convenient to abstain from any additional measure for fixing them."

The British officers were also of the same opinion. Although no actual demarcation was made on the ground, maps were



prepared on the basis of old usage and convention. These maps had been used in India for the last hundred years or so. They include the Aksai Chin region as part of Ladakh. Since the boundary of the Aksai Chin region with China-Tibet had not been marked on the ground, once or twice questions had been raised about the exact alignment of this boundary. Old Chinese maps had shown a different alignment.

Asked by D. P. Singh why Parliament was not taken into confidence earlier on the matter, Nehru stated : "There was not much to take into confidence about . . . . Without our knowledge they (the Chinese) have made a road in that extreme corner and we have been dealing with it through correspondence. No particular occasion arose to bring the matter to the House, because we thought that we might make progress by correspondence and when the time was ripe for it, we would inform Parliament."

In 1959, the Chinese built an additional road west of the Tibet-Sinkiang highway, besides new feeder roads designed to supply their outposts. On the other hand, not until 1960, did India take in hand in earnest the task of constructing lines of communication in the northern border area. In January, that year, the Border Roads Organization was set up, which built the road connecting Towang with Bomdila, in a record time of 18 months.

Early in 1960, Nehru invited Chou En-lai to visit New Delhi for a supreme effort to find a peaceful settlement of the border problem. Not much hopes of a settlement were however entertained in this country.

The Chinese Premier arrived in the Indian capital on April 19, and his talks with Nehru lasted six days. At their conclusion, the two Prime Ministers announced their failure to resolve the differences between the two countries.

Thereupon, it was agreed that the officials of the two Governments should meet to examine all relevant documents in support of the stands of the two Governments and report. Meanwhile, every effort should be made to avoid friction and clashes in the border areas.

During these talks, it is believed, Chou in effect proposed a barter deal to Nehru. The suggestion was that China was prepared to accommodate India along the NEFA frontier by



staying behind the McMahon Line, if India would be willing to accommodate China in Ladakh by accepting the line of actual control in that region. This proposal from Peking underlined the vital importance China attached to the highway they had constructed through Aksai Chin.

By now, the pressure of Indian public opinion, particularly of the opposition in Parliament, had driven Nehru into a corner, with no room left for manoeuvre. While the Chinese Premier was still in New Delhi, a mass demonstration was staged in front of Nehru's house demanding that the Government of India should not truckle under Chou En-lai's personal pressure. Nehru came out and addressed the crowd and assured them that not an inch of Indian soil would be yielded to China.

It is my view that it was most unfortunate that Nehru, at this moment, felt impelled to reject, out of hand, Chou's proposal—a proposal that should have made sense to any realist.

The territory in question in Aksai Chin was already firmly in possession of the Chinese. Nor was there any hope whatsoever of our being able to wrest it back in the near or distant future. In other words, we were being asked to give away what they had already annexed. In return, China was prepared to recognize the McMahon Line.

There are times when realists prefer to cut their losses when they are unprepared for the worse alternative. New Delhi knew too well that if it came to war, it could not militarily back up the stand it had taken up. But it looked as though the hoodoo that was pursuing India right through the course of the dispute with China, would not allow us to do anything to retrieve the situation.

The strategic value the Chinese attached to the highway they had constructed through Aksai Chin and their determination to retain possession of the area, come what may, is underlined in Peking's Note to New Delhi, dated December 26, 1959.

"This area is the only traffic artery linking Sinkiang and Western Tibet, because to its northeast lies the great Gobi of Sinkiang, through which direct traffic with Tibet is practically impossible," stated that Note, which further insisted



that the area had "all along been Chinese territory and that the Chinese had always used that route for traffic between Sinkiang and Tibet." Chou En-lai insisted that in 1950 it was through this area that units of the Chinese People's Liberation Army advanced from Sinkiang into Ari in Tibet.\*

The Chinese claimed that for hundreds of years, the Chinese border had been the Karakorum range to the Kongka Pass, Nehru told the Lok Sabha. They insisted that the northern part of this area pertained to Sinkiang, and not to Tibet. They said that this area was like the Gobi Desert—there was no normal administrative apparatus in the area but constructive control existed, with the administrative officer or tax-collector going there sometimes. They had been in constructive and actual possession of that area all along, long before the People's Government came.

But Nehru pointed out that the Chinese had never given precise boundaries by defining the latitude, longitude, mountain peaks, etc.

Chou En-lai went back from the Indian capital disappointed, embittered and in a rage—to which he gave vent at a midnight press conference at Kathmandu, where he flew from New Delhi. India's rejection of Chou's proposal was taken by Peking as a signal for tougher action.

It was apparent that in this frame of mind on either side, the subsequent talks between officials were doomed to failure and would amount to no more than a device to postpone the final breakdown and head off any immediate recriminations.

This became the next point of escalation in the Sino-Indian dispute. Peking made up its mind to precipitate a showdown with India. To that end, it decided to clear the board of other encumbrances.

China now made a special effort to cultivate Nepal. Aid was heaped upon Kathmandu. An economic agreement was signed which offered Nepal aid valued at Rs. 10 crores, with a clause that provided for the dispatch of a batch of Chinese experts and technicians to Nepal, with their passages and salaries paid by Peking. The Chinese also offered to train Nepalese technicians in China at China's expense. Besides,

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\* Chou En-lai's letter to Leaders of Asian and African countries on the Sino-Indian boundary question, dated November 15, 1962.



Peking decided to construct a road connecting Nepal with Tibet.

The Chinese opened a separate embassy at Kathmandu, with an enormous staff. Hitherto, their ambassador in New Delhi filled that function.

Peking further signed a border agreement with Nepal, in which it overlooked its own much-vaunted claim to Mount Everest. Indeed, the Nepalese Foreign Minister returning home from Peking after signing the Pact, re-asserted Nepal's jurisdiction over the tallest peak in the world, without a demur from Peking.

These Sino-Nepalese agreements signified Chinese political and economic penetration in a region hitherto considered by India as exclusively in her sphere of influence. Peking even offered to sign a non-aggression pact with Nepal, but the latter resisted it.

It was about Nepal that Nehru had a little while ago declared that an attack on that Himalayan Kingdom would be considered an attack on India and that Nepal's border was India's.

The same year, the Chinese Government rushed through a border agreement with Burma, in which it magnanimously accepted the McMahon Line as the frontier between the two countries, as if to spite India and wean Burma from a common grievance with India.

China then wooed Pakistan and offered a border agreement on its frontier with the Pak-occupied portion of Kashmir. Chou En-lai also chummed up with President Sukarno of Indonesia and patched up long-standing differences with Jakarta over the treatment of the large Chinese population inhabiting that country.

The idea behind all these moves was to isolate India from her neighbours. To that end, early in 1963, Peking even mooted a proposal for a Himalayan Federation comprising Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, NEFA and Nagaland. Peking's propaganda machinery in Asian and African countries now opened up full blast which misrepresented and maligned India in their eyes.

Simultaneously, the Sino-Indian border issue changed from a verbal squabble to a series of military incidents. As



the incidents multiplied and the Chinese nibbled further into Indian territory, Peking issued new maps to support their encroachments and initiate new territorial claims.

That led to the setting up of new, advanced check-posts and patrolling by either side of the formerly untouched areas, thus launching the two countries on a fateful collision course.

The proceedings of the officials' talks between India and China that followed the Nehru-Chou parleys in New Delhi were a filibustering waste of time. The Chinese had no use for these talks except to extract vital strategic information about our border region through searching questions, to which our side readily and obligingly supplied the answers.

The Chinese put twelve questions pertaining to locations in the Kameng sector (where they later launched their major thrust). In all, they asked for 25 clarifications in regard to the NEFA area.

At the end of these negotiations, the Chinese had collected the fullest possible strategical data relating to the border regions in NEFA—information which they fully exploited during their invasion two years later.

“Whereas the Chinese side provided answers to only 59 of the 118 questions put by the Indian side—and these too were in most cases incomplete or partial answers—the Indian side answered fully all the questions put by the Chinese side,” complained the Indian officials’ report on the talks.

The report continued :

“At one stage, the Chinese side questioned the relevance of attempt to obtain a detailed understanding of the boundary line claimed by them, and proposed that the Indian side restrict themselves to some specific and important points on the boundary so that all discussion on Item 1 (location and terrain features of the boundary) could be completed by the 12th session of the conference.

“The Indian side pointed out that Item 1 was of basic importance because only when the two sides had a precise and clear understanding of the location of the alignment would they know the exact areas of dispute and be able to bring forward documents in support of the stands of the two Governments.

“The Chinese side themselves had asked many detailed



questions and the Indian side had always replied to them.

"The Chinese side then withdrew their proposal but wished to know whether the insistence of the Indian side on knowing the precise location of the Chinese alignment meant that if they knew it, the Indian personnel would not cross the line."

With the stepping-up of Chinese provocations along the border came other evidence of hostile activity in the frontier region.



## IV

### THE DIE IS CAST

THE YEAR 1961 drew to a close with the northern sky darkened by war clouds. Tension on the Indo-Tibetan border heightened, threatening to explode any moment.

As the Chinese moved further into Indian territory, both in the western and the eastern sector, New Delhi fired protests at Peking with the rapidity of a machine-gun—indeed, if protests were lethal missiles, China would have been crushed by their sheer weight and numbers.

An agitated country demanded of Government firm and concrete action.

Psychologically and militarily still unprepared for action, and still clinging to its belief that China would not precipitate a showdown, New Delhi improvised a “forward policy” without any teeth in it. It seemed as though it was intended more to pacify Indian public opinion than really to checkmate the Chinese threat on our northern border.

Our military forces confronting the Chinese were woefully inadequate, with poor logistical support, mostly depending upon air-supply for maintenance. In contrast, the Chinese, superior in numbers, had not only shorter distances to their bases, but were also fed by a network of roads behind them.

Between 1959 and 1961, while New Delhi dithered, held conferences, pushed files, passed the buck, exchanged elaborate memoranda and took some half-hearted measures, the Chinese went ahead in a businesslike manner with their own “forward policy” in Ladakh—pitching new posts and sending out patrols far across the Indian border, building a network of roads and gobbling up more and more Indian territory.

Till June 1959, Indian police patrols had found the Kongka Pass unoccupied. The Chinese had not yet come forward from the Aksai Chin road and Lanak La. Their forward posts in Ladakh were at Spanggur and Khurnak Fort.

But on October 21, 1959, our patrols ran into a Chinese ambush near Kongka La, and by December 1959, the Chinese had laid a motorable road from Lanak La to Kongka La in



the middle sector. In the north, they had built another road along the river-bed of the Qarakash, from Qaratagh to Sumdo, and further on to Shamal Lungpo. That established for them a north-south line of control from Qaratagh, Shamal Lungpo and Lanak La.

During 1960, the Chinese turned their attention further south, to the Cheng Chenmo valley and Pongong Tso, by opening posts at Nyagzu and Dambuguru. During 1961, they also completed construction of a road linking these posts to Khurnak Fort and to Kongka La. Yet another new road connected Rudok in Tibet with Spanggur.

The Chinese had incorporated about 1,400-1,800 square miles of territory between Chang Chenmo Valley and Khurnak Fort in the central sector of Ladakh.

By the end of 1961, our intelligence reports indicated that the Chinese were developing their post at Spanggur and now had two companies of their troops stationed there.

Spanggur belonged to India and lay within the belt which the Chinese themselves claimed that they did not even patrol. Further north, the Chinese had also fortified at Chip Chap and Sumdo.

Reports were also received of the Chinese consolidating their position in the Tibetan region adjacent to the NEFA border. They sent a force into the Pemako region, opposite the Siang and Lohit Divisions of NEFA, and their patrols now came right up to our borders.

At this point, the border passes are about the lowest. The Pemako area provided a particularly short and perhaps more easily developable route from the Sikang-Lhasa highway along the Siang Valley towards NEFA.

New Chinese posts were discovered in the vicinity of the Lola Pass (across the Kameng sector) and of Glei Dakhru Pass (across the Lohit sector). Chinese patrols began visiting the Thagla (across the Subansiri sector) and Sama (across the Lohit Sector). The Chinese expedited the construction of the road from Ghayul Dzong to Lung and from Marmang to Le (across the Kameng sector).

The Chinese also wooed the tribals in NEFA in diverse ways. An instance was a batch of Tagins of the Subansiri Frontier Division who had escaped across the border after committing



offences in Indian territory. They were given shelter by the Chinese in Tibet and two of them were appointed village officials and equipped with rifles.

In November 1961, the Prime Minister issued fresh directions to our forces in Ladakh and NEFA. They were now asked to patrol as far forward as possible from their existing positions towards the international border.

This was to be done with a view to establishing our posts which should prevent the Chinese from advancing further and dominating any posts which they might have already established in our territory. The patrols were not to get involved in a clash with the Chinese, unless that became necessary in self-defence.

In regard to the U.P.-Tibet border there were not the same difficulties as in Ladakh. Our security forces were therefore asked, as far as practicable, to go forward and be in effective occupation of the whole frontier. Where there were any gaps, they were to be covered either by patrolling or by posts.

Accordingly, on December 5, 1961, the Army HQ directed Eastern as well as Western Commands to patrol as far forward as possible towards the international border ; to establish additional posts to prevent the Chinese from advancing further and also to dominate any Chinese posts already established in our territory ; to be in effective occupation of the whole frontier ; to cover gaps either by patrolling or by posts ; and finally to make a re-appraisal of the tasks.

With this directive, the Government of India launched its "forward policy" along the northern frontier. The die was cast.

The COAS (Gen. Thapar), on May 6, 1962, had assured the Prime Minister that in the event of the Chinese taking aggressive action against our posts in the Aksai Chin area, we might be in a position to take retaliatory measures by capturing the Chinese Spanggur post as we were numerically superior to them in the Chushul area. It was noted however that for a local offensive from Chushul, induction of reinforcements would be necessary. But nothing was done about it.

On May 4, the Army HQ cautioned Western Command about the strong Chinese reaction to our posts at the Chip Chap river front in North Ladakh and warned of the possibi-



lity of their attempting to overrun our posts. Reinforcements were ordered to these posts by May 15. Simultaneously, Eastern Command was told that our planned posts along the NEFA-Tibet border must be in position at the earliest, but not later than May 20.

The cgs backed up the instructions to the Western Command with a note which stressed the need for vigorous patrolling activity even when the strength of individual posts was limited in order to assert our "forward policy" more effectively and to sustain the offensive spirit of the troops in our posts in Ladakh, particularly in the northern areas. All patrols were however to be essentially reconnaissance patrols who were to be instructed to open fire only in self-defence.

With the Government of India's "forward policy" gaining momentum, now it was the turn of Chinese protests, which came thick and fast, against alleged violations of their territory and warning India of the consequences.

With the two "forward policies" now in full swing, Ladakh, particularly the Aksai Chin plateau, was turned into a stage for a dangerous game of bluff. Chinese and Indian posts were set up indiscriminately in such a way that they got interspersed and mixed up in an interlocking pattern, which could only lead to an unending series of incidents and sustained tension.

Indeed, our Intelligence now anticipated a Chinese attempt to break the line of the new posts established by India during the preceding few months by counterpenetration where possible, and by seizing any opportunity that they could find to break the well-established line along the international frontier held by us in southern Ladakh.

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The phase of "phoney war" is now at an end.

On May 23, 1962, a signal from the Western Command speaks of more Chinese activity opposite our posts in Ladakh and of a possible Chinese intention of committing further aggression on our territory by establishing new posts to guard against threats to the flanks of their road construction to the forward post in Daulet Beg Oldi and the Spanggur area.



The Chinese issue orders to resume forward patrolling to their troops stationed between the Karakorum Pass and the Kongka La. Simultaneously, the Chinese threaten to organize patrolling along the rest of the border, if Indian patrolling activity in Ladakh is not stopped.

The Chinese protests warn of "defending" themselves if Indian troops persist in their efforts to establish fresh outposts in unoccupied territory in Ladakh. As a counter-measure, the Chinese surround the newly established Indian posts in the Chip Chap valley with large bodies of their troops.

Simultaneously, the Chinese begin to push towards their 1960 claim line and establish 30 additional posts, as against 35 posts we set up in 1962.

In addition, the Chinese are found building three new roads : one from Samzungling along the Galwan river up to a point near our post ; another from Khurnak Fort to the vicinity of Sirijap ; and the third from Spanggur to Shinzang along the southern bank of the Spanggur lake.

At the conclusion of a tour of Ladakh on June 25-26, the GGS, Lt.-Gen. Kaul observes in his report to the Army Chief :

"It is better for us to establish as many posts as we can in Ladakh, even though in penny-packets, rather than wait for a substantial build-up, as *I am convinced that the Chinese will not attack any of our positions even if they are relatively weaker than theirs.*" (Emphasis added.)

It is, however, disturbing to note that as late as June 26, 1962, the GGS is still clinging to the belief that the Chinese would not attack and that it is all a game of bluff ! During the first ten days of July, 378 Notes are exchanged between New Delhi and Peking.

The situation further deteriorates in Ladakh, with the Chinese infiltrating into the lower reaches of the Galwan valley, where an Indian post is surrounded on three sides by 400 Chinese.

The following month, the Chinese turn to the central sector of Ladakh and isolate the Indian post at Yula in the Pongong Lake area. Yula and Sirijap were being maintained by boat over the Pongong Lake.

On August 17—for the first time—our troops are authorized to fire back at the Chinese in order to prevent their encircling



our posts in Ladakh.

The GOC-in-C, Western Command, is given orders "to take every possible step to prevent the Chinese from establishing posts behind our own. In the event, however, of the Chinese failure to withdraw and their continuing to encircle our positions, our troops are authorized to open fire on the Chinese and prevent such encirclement."

The Chinese tactics now are to occupy our "dropping zones" and thus cut out our posts' air supply line. Our posts are therefore instructed to resist the Chinese attempts by covering the dropping zones with their fire. "Chinese attempts to occupy DZs will be treated as threat to our posts and repulsed by fire," says the order.

Thus, at last, the gauntlet is thrown. The challenge is accepted.

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In mid-August 1962, the GOC-in-C, Western Command, Lt. Gen. Daulat Singh, however struck a jarring note. He bitterly complained of the inadequacy of the defences in Ladakh to hold a full-scale attack by the Chinese. Daulat Singh charged that his repeated representations to the Army HQ asking for a minimum of one division for the defence of Ladakh had not been complied with.

Consequently, the deployment pattern of the existing small Indian force in Ladakh had meant claiming territory by "show of flag" rather than by tactical considerations, Daulat Singh maintained. He was of the view that the situation had got worse since the launching of the "forward policy," as the Chinese reaction to that policy had been sharp and significant. The Chinese had built up a full division in Ladakh by now, as against our two regular and two militia battalions.

Gen. Daulat Singh warned that if the present race for the establishment of posts was continued, the Chinese would outrun us in every sector and at every stage. Indeed, with the present quantum of forces and military capabilities on either side, it would be immeasurably to the advantage of the Chinese to entice us to continue this race. The Chinese



capacity for the build up of their forces in Ladakh was out of all proportion to ours, as they started off with a four-to-one superiority.

The GOC-in-C pleaded that military logic be brought to bear on the problem, as hitherto the military means had been grossly out of step with the political needs. He further complained that our forward posts in Ladakh were nowhere tactically sited, whereas the Chinese everywhere were. Our forward posts, anchored to their DZs (dropping zones), were tactically dominated by Chinese posts on higher ground.

He characterized our general deployment as having been dictated by the "show flag" political requirement rather than by rational military considerations and as lacking a planned military pattern. The Chinese deployment build-up, on the other hand, showed clear evidence of a tactically sound plan, in support of a declared objective.

Daulat Singh thought that the Indian Army did not have a clear-cut aim in Ladakh, or if there was one it was not served by adequate military means. He was of the view that the Chinese had the military capability to extend their occupation in Ladakh to well beyond their 1960 line and whether they had the intention to do so was a matter for the Government to assess. But if they had that intention, the Indian army did not have the ability to prevent it.

Daulat Singh grimly concluded : "I would be failing in my duty if I did not draw attention to the size and shape of this potential threat and the means required to contain it. . . . Finally, I submit that this is an issue which permits of no delay in decision-making at the highest national level. I concede that the military means asked for appear to be of somewhat considerable size, but that is not so when viewed in the context of safeguarding national security in this theatre. Anything less will not make that aim realizable . . ."

Gen. Daulat Singh's views are reported to have been discussed at length at a special conference at the Army HQ, with the COAS, Gen. Thapar presiding. Daulat Singh himself was also present. At this conference however the familiar process of looking for "difficulties in every solution" was gone through, debating points scored and it was proved to everybody's satisfaction that Daulat Singh's proposals were not feasible.



Later, formally conveying the decisions of the conference to GOC-in-C, Western Command, the CGS, Gen. Kaul, referred to the former's request for induction of a Mountain Division of three brigade groups into Ladakh by September 1963 and one brigade group suitably poised for induction into Ladakh by March 1965, and stated it was not possible to accept the schedule proposed for the Mountain Division of three brigade groups to be completed by September 1963.

As regards our aim in Ladakh, the CGS is believed to have reiterated that it was to resist any further Chinese ingress into our territory and to defend Leh, and added that the Army HQ. had pointed out to Government that with the limited means at present available, the fulfilment of this aim was difficult to guarantee. The Government, being well aware of that limitation, accepted this position.



## V

### THE "PHONEY WAR" ENDS

THE HECTIC "PHONEY WAR" abruptly came to an end on October 10, 1962—an exercise in which the two sides had played an exhilarating game of "filling vacuums."

A senior Indian Army officer had described those goings-on in Ladakh as "a sort of game. They would stick up a post there, we would stick up a post here. We did not think it would come to much more".

But one of the sides had filled one vacuum too many! And there was a clash between the Chinese and Indian forces at Tse Jong, in the Dhola area, in the Kameng sector of NEFA. That was the spark that ignited the tinder.

Indeed, a lighted torch had been confronting dry tinder for the preceding twenty-eight days, generating furious thinking and feverish activity in New Delhi.

On September 8, a signal to the Army HQ had reported that a Chinese force had that day crossed the frontier at 14.30 hours and surrounded our post at Dhola, south of the Namka Chu (River) and Thag la.

This post had been just set up by the Indian Army three months earlier, in June, in a vigorous prosecution of the newly launched "forward policy".

New Delhi was not prepared for such a sharp reaction from Peking. Nor was the Government in a position to resist, any more, the pressure of public opinion demanding action against Chinese provocations.

The Army HQ immediately ordered a battalion (9 Punjab) to proceed to Dhola. Ultimately, a full brigade was to be concentrated in the area. At a meeting in the Defence Minister V. K. Krishna Menon's office, Lt. Gen. L. P. Sen, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, reported the Chinese strength at Dhola as 600. He estimated that he would need an infantry brigade to eject the Chinese force, and that it would take ten days to move a brigade to the Dhola area.\*

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\* For the basic facts in this chapter, the author has relied on among other sources, "*The Untold Story*" by Lt.-Gen. B.M. Kaul.



On September 12, the Government ordered the eviction of the Chinese from Dhola. Both Lt.-Gen. Umrao Singh, 33 Corps Commander, and Maj.-Gen. Niranjana Prasad, 4 Division Commander, declared the task as beyond the capacity of the troops at their disposal, in view of logistical difficulties, inadequate build-up of supplies and equipment and deficient fire support, as compared with the high state of preparedness of the Chinese, on the other side.

Indeed, Umrao Singh expressed the view that any such attempt would amount to a rash act. He was in favour of withdrawing from Dhola and concentrating on the defence of Towang. Towang, where the largest Buddhist monastery in India is located, was strategically more important and better situated.

The Government insisted on its orders being implemented.

Even at this late hour, however, when the oc of 9 Punjab, Lt.-Col. Misra, asked for instructions in case he encountered the Chinese on his way to Dhola, he was told that he should "persuade" the Chinese to go away, and not to open fire except in self-defence, and that only when the Chinese were within 50 yards !

On September 14, at a conference at the Defence Ministry, the Army Chief, Gen. P. N. Thapar, warned the Government of the consequences of any armed action in NEFA by the Indian Army in view of the many deficiencies from which it suffered there.

Lt.-Gen. Daulat Singh, GOC-in-C, Western Command, joined Thapar and declared that if the Chinese attacked us in Ladakh, they would annihilate the defending Indian forces.

Lt.-Gen. Sen, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, was equally blunt about the weakness of the Indian forces in NEFA.

But the Government was now all for action, at any price—being driven to it by the pressure of public opinion.

Thus, at the penultimate moment, it was the Government that was demanding of the Army to act, irrespective of the consequences. And it was the Army leaders that were cautioning the Government against rash action.

The same day, an official handout from New Delhi announced : "Indian troops have moved up in strength towards the Thag la ridge. Our post in NEFA (*i.e.* in Dhola) has been



strengthened and the Eastern Command is continuing its efforts to deal with the situation." The reference here is to the brigade in Towang being moved up to the Dhola area, which actually did not reach Dhola till September 24.

On September 18, a Government spokesman announced at a press conference, that the Army had been instructed to drive the Chinese out of the Dhola area (the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister and the Finance Minister were then all abroad).

On September 20, Brig. J. P. Dalvi arrived in Dhola and discussed with Lt.-Col. Misra the possibilities of implementing the Government's order. And even as our commanders were still discussing the proposition handed to them by Government, at midnight that day, a Chinese party threw a grenade into one of our bunkers. Three of our men were wounded. That led to an exchange of fire between the two sides, in which two Chinese were killed and two wounded. The firing then stopped.

Throughout this period, the Chinese kept chanting on amplifiers projected to the Indian troops: "*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai. Ye zamin hamari hai. Tum Vapas Jao.*" ("Indians and Chinese are brothers. This is our territory. You go back.")

Thereafter, intermittent firing continued between the two sides.

On September 22, at a crucial meeting, presided over by the Deputy Minister for Defence, K. Raghuramaiah (Krishna Menon was away at the UN), the Government insisted that for political reasons, there was no alternative but to undertake the task of evicting the Chinese from the Dhola area. Thereupon, Army Chief Thapar demanded a written order to that effect. The order was duly issued by the Government, under the signature of H. G. Sarin, then a Joint Secretary in the Defence Ministry.

On September 28, the Chinese opened automatic fire on Bridge No. 2 in the Dhola area and wounded three Indians. The next day, the Indians fired four rounds of 3-inch mortar, for the first time.

At a meeting at the Defence Ministry, on September 30, Krishna Menon (according to Kaul) explained to the Army



leaders that the Government's policy was to make an impact on the Chinese in NEFA before they settled down for the winter.

Accordingly, on October 3, a special corps, 4 Corps, was formed and Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul was appointed its commander, and given the mandate to expel the Chinese from Indian territory in NEFA.

At an interview on the eve of Kaul's departure for NEFA to assume command of 4 Corps, Nehru told him that he "hoped the Chinese would see reason and withdraw from Dhola. But in case they did not, we would have no option but to expel them from our territory or at least try to do so to the best of our ability. If we failed to take such action," Nehru said, "Government would forfeit public confidence completely."\*

No sooner he assumed command of 4 Corps than Kaul proceeded to Dhola to study the situation on the spot. It took him three days by helicopter and foot-slogging over high altitudes to get to Dhola.

By now the Indian and Chinese forces had been facing each other across the Namka chu for a month, entrenched on either side of the river.

On October 8, while Kaul was in conference with the local commanders, the Chinese fired one burst of automatic rifle from about 400 yards away. The Indians did not respond, and the incident died down.

Two days later the "real thing" began. At dawn, on October 10, a Chinese force, 500 strong, attacked our position at Tse Jong, in our territory, north of the Namka chu. The Indian Army had set up a post at Tse Jong a day earlier, without any opposition from the Chinese.

According to the "rules of the game" hitherto, if one side "filled a vacuum," the other side honoured it, and in retaliation filled another vacuum. It was thus expected that once we occupied Tse Jong, its possession would not be challenged by the Chinese. But it was also realized that if the Chinese took into their heads to push out our tiny group of fifty men, we could neither prevent it nor send them any reinforcements.

Nevertheless, when attacked, the Indian post at Tse Jong, well dug in and occupying a dominating position, put up a gallant defence. Another section of 9 Punjab joined the fray

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\* Lt.-Gen. Kaul, *The Untold Story*.



and opened fire on the enemy from higher ground. The Chinese attack was repulsed, inflicting heavy casualties.

Later, the Chinese launched a second and larger attack from three directions. This time, overwhelmed by superior numbers, the Indian post withdrew to the south of the river.

The score at the end of the engagement was : On the Indian side, six dead, 11 wounded, 5 missing. The Chinese, according to Peking Radio, suffered 100 casualties.

This was the first armed confrontation between the Chinese and Indian forces. Clearly, the engagement presaged graver developments. It underlined a new determination on the part of the Chinese not to allow Indians to set up any more posts in border territory they claimed to be theirs.

The other significance of the battle was that India had, at last, accepted the challenge.

But, alas, the Dhola bowl was the wrong place for the Indian forces to make a stand in. Our position in the hollow of Dhola was patently untenable, what with the enemy dominating the heights in front of it. Entrenched on the slope of the Thag la ridge (14,500 ft.), the Chinese looked down on our position in Dhola at 12,000 ft. If we had to fight in this area, we should have fallen back on the Lumpu high ground.

At this time, we had just two brigades guarding the entire 300 mile-odd NEFA border—7 Brigade based in Towang and 5 Brigade strung all along the rest of the front over Subansiri, Siang and Lohit sectors. (The third brigade of the Division was far down in Imphal, in Manipur.)

Indeed, our troops had blundered into the Dhola trap, and then for political reasons, the Government had decided that our tiny force there should stay put, even though the Army authorities were reluctant to do so.

The Chinese had one full division deployed against our one brigade in the Dhola area. Whereas first-class lines of communication supplied and fed the Chinese forces, our nearest roadhead at Towang was 60 miles away, and our troops were already on austerity rations and were short of weapons, ammunition, boots and winter clothing. On the eve of the action against the Chinese in Dhola, the two battalions (2 Rajputs and 1/9 Gurkhas) holding positions in the area, had only 3 days' rations and 50 rounds of small arms



ammunition. Mortars and ammunition were still in transit from Lumpu to Dhola. The men were still in summer uniforms at that altitude.

Our troops in Dhola entirely depended upon supply-drops from the air, which were proving both difficult and ineffective. They fell into inaccessible ravines and were often irretrievable. In one case, vitally needed guns, air-dropped on Tsanghdar, were smashed to smithereens, with the parachutes failing to open.

Having seen things for himself on the spot, the new Corps Commander thoroughly agreed with the Divisional Commander Niranjan Prasad and Brigade Commander J. P. Dalvi that the orders to expel the enemy from the Dhola area were impractical.

Kaul flew back to New Delhi on October 11 and reported his on-the-spot impressions to the Prime Minister, at a meeting attended by the Defence Minister and the Army Chief.

Kaul told the meeting that the Government's order to throw out the Chinese could never be carried out by the tiny, ill-equipped and badly positioned Indian force at Dhola. He emphasized that our position in Dhola was untenable, that it was in a gorge with no room for manoeuvre, and dominated by the Chinese. Both tactically and logistically, the Chinese were in an advantageous position, and in any showdown they would easily gain the upper hand. In fact, Kaul expressed himself in favour of pulling out of Dhola to a tactically more suitable area.

After a discussion, Nehru reluctantly agreed to amend his original orders of "throw out the Chinese" to "hold" our position in Dhola against the Chinese. The amended order was then duly sent down.

It was thus that the commanders in the forward areas were somewhat surprised to hear on the radio the Prime Minister's statement to the Press on October 13.

At Palam airport, that morning, on the eve of his departure for Colombo, Nehru told newsmen that instructions had been given to the troops to throw the Chinese "out of our territory" in NEFA. Answering a supplementary question seeking elucidation, the Prime Minister added, "I cannot fix a date. That is entirely for the Army to decide".



This statement by Nehru evoked, at the time, a furious controversy in the country and abroad. Kaul's *The Untold Story*, once again, blew over the ambers of the controversy after a lapse of five years.

Nehru has been charged with uttering an untruth, on the assumption that his statement to the Press on October 13, was directly related to the Government's decision taken at the midnight conference on October 11, at which the original order was amended from "throwing out" the Chinese from Dhola to "holding" Dhola against the Chinese.

To my mind such an assumption is unwarranted, if one reads the Prime Minister's statement in its entirety, taking together with it, his remarks : "I cannot fix a date. That is entirely for the Army to decide".

Obviously, if he had in mind the limited problem of Dhola as discussed on the night of October 11, he would not vaguely state that the question as to when the Chinese should be thrown out of our territory had been left for the Army to decide. It should be emphasized that the October 11 decision related to the situation immediately confronting our troops at Dhola. On the other hand, Nehru's utterance to the Press on October 13 was a purely political statement whose significance lay in the fact that it announced an important change in the Government's policy, primarily designed to appease an angry and impatient public opinion in the country, namely, that the Government would not hereafter take lying down Chinese encroachments on Indian territory, but proposed to take vigorous action in the shape of armed resistance and retaliation.

Since the October 13 general statement did not relate to the October 11 specific decision, it did not contradict that decision, which was limited to a particular situation. Indeed, the amended decision of October 11 to "hold" on to the Dhola position—or, for that matter, even to evacuate it, if military tactics demanded it—could also be a mere tactical phase in the general decision of strategy taken by the Government, which was to, hereafter, fight back and resist the Chinese.

I certainly deplore the amphibological character of Nehru's statement—particularly at a critical moment, when clarity and caution in expression were all the more called for on the



part of the head of a Government. But I am not prepared to support the charge that Nehru deliberately spoke an untruth, as some of his critics have alleged, and even Kaul seems to suggest in his book. One must credit Nehru with that much sense—even in self-interest—as not to make a statement that would be immediately contradicted by events.

The ambiguity of the statement seems deliberate and stems from the twin motive of simultaneously offering a sop to a critical, clamorous public opinion in the country and warning the Chinese of the Government of India's new policy and of its consequences to the Chinese if they persisted in their tactics. For it is quite possible that Nehru was naive enough to expect that by making a public announcement of a new militant policy of vigorous armed resistance the Chinese might be induced to put a stop to their reckless brinkmanship on the Indo-Tibetan border.

This assumption is in keeping with Nehru's firm conviction, to which he clung to the end, that the Chinese were bluffing and would never go to war against India to settle their border disputes. Indeed, it was believed that Chou En-lai had conveyed to Nehru, through Krishna Menon, such an assurance, when the Indian Defence Minister met the Chinese Premier at Geneva a few months earlier.

It would be equally wrong to allege that Nehru's statement of October 13 precipitated the Chinese massive onslaught on India's northern border on October 20. For there is plenty of evidence to prove that the Chinese had been, for long, militarily building up all along the 2,600-mile Indo-Tibetan frontier, in preparation for a clash with India. As realists, they would appear to have anticipated such a clash in the pursuit of a blatantly expansionist policy which could not but meet resistance from the other side sooner or later.

The entire border region on the Tibetan side of the frontier, had been criss-crossed by strategic roads, a process begun as far back as 1955 when the "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai" slogan was still in vogue in both New Delhi and Peking. Running slightly north of the McMahon Line, the Chinese had built a first-class 3-tonner road, besides a network of feeder roads leading to it. They had an airfield at Narayumtso, some 50 miles from Bum la, the nearest point to the Kameng Sub-



division of NEFA and to Bhutan.

By October 1962, the Chinese had four divisions facing NEFA alone, as against one division (less one brigade) on the Indian side. Since 1959, the mounting Chinese bellicosity towards India clearly betrayed Peking's evil intentions towards New Delhi.

The Chinese tactics in Ladakh for long had made it apparent that their policy was to push forward resolutely into our territory in Ladakh up to their claim-line, which further leap-frogged into our territory with each issue of new maps—*peacefully, if possible ; by force, if necessary.*

Till the middle of 1962, our passivity made peaceful progress of the Chinese "forward policy" possible and practicable, and they did not find it necessary to use force at any stage. But in June 1962, they were confronted with our own "forward policy", and that made a clash inevitable—an eventuality for which they had all along been keeping themselves ready.

According to intelligence reports, on the eve of the October 1962 outbreak, the Chinese had inducted six additional battalions along the Indo-Tibetan border. The total number of Chinese troops in Tibet as a whole was stated to be of the order of eight divisions. Of these, a little under seven divisions were said to have been dispersed in the south and south-western border areas.

In addition, two regiments (4,000 men) from Sinkiang were deployed opposite north Ladakh. The strength of the Chinese troops in south Ladakh, and along the Punjab-Himachal Pradesh-Uttar Pradesh border was estimated at seven battalions.

For a week or more preceding the massive Chinese onslaught of October 20, feverish activity was observed on the other side in the Thang La area. They brought their artillery pieces loaded on animals and sited them against our positions in Dhola, while we had none on our side.

When the Chinese actually launched their massive attacks simultaneously in Ladakh and NEFA, the Indian military authorities in the field, far from precipitating the war, were still discussing ways and means of implementing the Govern-



ment's order demanding of them to resist a numerically much superior force, better equipped and better supplied—a task which they had unanimously declared as an impossible one, with the meagre troops, weapons and resources at their disposal at that moment.



## VI

### DISGRACE ABOUNDING

AFTER SEPTEMBER 1962, even the blind could have seen that the Chinese were on the warpath and were busy preparing for the D day.

A Chinese note on September 13, couched in belligerent language, peremptorily proposed negotiations on October 15 and withdrawal of the forces of the two sides 20 km. along the border in order to ease tension.

The note charged India with "pursuing a dual policy of sham negotiations and actual fighting," and alleged that the Indian Government had no desire to solve the boundary question peacefully through negotiations, but was "using peaceful pretensions as a cover for its plan of nibbling into Chinese territory and altering the status quo on the frontier."

This was strong language even for Peking, which has generally been uninhibited in style in its diplomatic exchanges with new Delhi. From the very language of the latest note, it was clear that the Chinese Government did not expect New Delhi to grasp at their prickly offer.

As could be anticipated, New Delhi, on September 19, rejected the Chinese proposal on the ground that "it leaves the aggressor in possession of the fruit of his aggression." Indeed, this was the first time that New Delhi had named China as "aggressor."

On October 17, a Chinese force, of battalion strength, moved into Dum Dum la, opposite our post in Tsangley, a key point near the tri-junction between Bhutan, Tibet and India, and on the way to Thag la. The next day, a Chinese patrol from Dum Dum la moved towards Bridge 5 in Dhola, and was fired upon by Indian troops, killing one Chinese.

On October 19, our post at Tsanghdar reported that a force of 2,000 Chinese was moving from Thag la towards Tsangley. The same evening, a Chinese military VIP was observed driving up in a jeep on their side of the front, evidently to inspect the troops and their positions, as though preliminary to an attack.

Indeed, from October 15 to 19, feverish activity and move-



ment were noticed on the other side of the line.

The Chinese were so thoroughly set for war that they had a body of cameramen and interpreters accompanying their forces in NEFA from as early as April 1962, Brig. J. P. Dalvi, commander of 7 Brigade, in the Dhola area, told me.

"Whereas the normal military dictum asks for a 3 to 1 numerical superiority over the enemy for attack, Mao's rules demand 5 to 1 superiority," said Dalvi, "and so the Chinese piled up men on the NEFA front so as to achieve that ratio and enable them to put into practice their 'human waves' tactics." By October 1962, according to Dalvi, the Chinese had built up a force of 10,000 on the Kameng sector of the NEFA front.

When on October 20, the Chinese launched their massive offensive on the NEFA front, the Indian forces had no corps commander to direct and co-ordinate the operations, apart from suffering other diverse handicaps. Kaul had been flown to New Delhi for treatment for Oedema, a high-altitude ailment.

On D day, at 0430 hours, the Chinese poured a "human flood" into our positions in the Dhola area. They came in two-battalion strength (2,000 men) armed with automatic rifles, 9 mm. guns, heavy mortars and artillery. Defending the scattered half-dozen Indian positions were, in all, some 600 men, comprising two companies.

The Chinese avalanche swept away the Indian positions in no time. Our main post in Dhola was wiped out. Almost simultaneously, Khinzemane, ten miles east of Dhola, was overrun. The tiny force in Tsangley withdrew into Bhutan. Hathung la was in enemy hands the next morning.

The next day, at 0500 hours, the Chinese attacked Tsangdhar, the 7 Brigade HQ., with artillery and mortar fire. The Indians fired back and soon ran out of ammunition. The enemy overpowered the defenders and captured the brigade Commander Dalvi and some of his staff.

A helicopter sent by the Divisional HQ with a wireless set and a signals officer, landed in Tsangdhar after the Chinese had taken it. The pilot is believed to have been shot dead and the helicopter captured by the enemy.

The Chinese, by now, had got a full division across the



Namka Chu and spread themselves along a ten-mile front from Dhola to Khinzemane, which kept our own defence line stretched thinly, preventing our forces from regrouping.

Meanwhile, the Chinese column that captured Khinzemane struck a few miles further east to take the Indian border town of Bum la. Here the Sikhs put up a stiff resistance and inflicted many casualties, before abandoning the post to superior numbers.

Bum la lies six miles directly north, in a straight line, of Towang, the monastery town. The capture of Bum la enabled the Chinese to mount an attack on Towang, from a point of vantage and higher altitude, in the north. With the fall of Lumpu, on October 21, we lost all physical contact with the Dhola-Thag la area.

All these places had fallen like ninepins. And on October 22, the enemy was poised to strike at Towang.

Apart from being the location of the largest Buddhist monastery in India, Towang was also the administrative town for the area and the roadhead for the Indian army, comprising a vital strategic point in our defence line—Towang-Tse la-Bomdila-Foothills-Tezpur.

Our troops had fallen back on Towang in a fairly orderly manner. Brigadier (now Major-General) Kalyan Singh, commanding the artillery in the area, assumed leadership in the absence of Dalvi, and organized the defence of Towang. Incidentally, it was for the outstanding leadership he displayed on this occasion that Kalyan Singh was awarded the Vishishta Seva Medal.

The Chinese developed a three-pronged attack on Towang, from the west, the north and the east. Following the fall of the brigade headquarters at Tsangdhar and dispersal and annihilation of part of our forces, the defences of Towang had been considerably weakened. Kalyan Singh held out until the Towang garrison was ordered to fall back to Jang, five miles to the east. The withdrawing force left behind a large quantity of supplies.

Lt.Gen. Sen, goc-in-c, Eastern Command, flew into Towang and took command in the absence of the Corps Commander who was lying ill in New Delhi. He ordered the withdrawal of the Towang garrison to the south of Jang, as there was



danger of its being encircled by the Chinese who had by now expanded to division strength.

The enemy occupied Towang unopposed on October 25. We were then pushed back from Jang and withdrew to Tse la. Exhausted gunners pushed and shoved most of the artillery over a narrow jeep trail to safety before the Chinese captured Jang.

Meanwhile, on October 22, the Chinese opened a new sector, far east on the NEFA front, when they pushed in the direction of Kibitoo, down the Lohit river, in the Lohit Frontier Division, with Walong as their ultimate objective. At this stage, it looked like no more than a diversionary move to pin down a chunk of our forces.

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So far as NEFA was concerned, the first phase of the Chinese offensive concluded on October 25.

Simultaneously, on October 20, the Chinese had also launched attacks on our positions in Ladakh. But in Ladakh the pattern of fighting was different. In NEFA they fought for territory and for the strategic passes. In Ladakh, it was a struggle for far-flung, isolated posts each manned by no more than 30 or 40 men, with Chinese and Indian posts thoroughly mixed up with each other. The fighting here took the shape of the Chinese surrounding our posts in superior numbers and forcing the small Indian garrisons either to evict or fight it out to the tragic end.

Completely lacking in land communications, these posts depended on air supply for their sustenance, which rendered them extremely vulnerable in case of an attack. On the other hand, the Chinese posts were linked up by a network of 800 miles of roads criss-crossing the entire eastern Ladakh, that solved their logistical problem.

The Chinese also deployed here two squadrons of P-70 Russian-built tanks, and this superiority of armour was employed to deadly effect in their attacks on Siri Jap in the Chushul sector.



On the very first day, the Chinese attacked 11 of the 16 Indian posts in a string, in the northern sector.

Daulat Beg Oldi, at the foot of Karakorum, was the northern-most Indian post, completely isolated and entirely dependent on air supply. One of the key Chinese roads leads from Qara Tagh Pass towards Oldi. The Chinese came along this road and launched an attack on Oldi. Out-numbered 10 to 1, the defenders fought valiantly until, on October 23, they were ordered to withdraw.

In the next two days, our posts at Point 18540 and Galwan too fell.

This withdrawal from Oldi gave the Chinese domination of both sides of the Karakorum Pass and another important route into the battle area. It also meant the Chinese control of the hump-shaped piece of northeastern Ladakh from the Karakorum Pass to Demchok.

In a post below the Chip Chap river, 30 Jawans held at bay more than 500 Chinese for a whole day and at the end of the engagement only four of them survived, while the Chinese were reported to have suffered more than 150 casualties. This was typical of the fighting all over Ladakh.

In the middle sector, the Chinese pushed our forces out of Kong Ka and Cheng Chenmo, while the Indians withdrew from Ane la and Chartse to Phobrang.

With the fall of Yula, on October 24, in 48 hours the Chinese had the whole of northern Ladakh in the bag. On October 27, more of our posts were abandoned or overrun by the enemy in Chang la, Jara la, Demchok and Nulla Junction in the southern sector and Hot Spring in the middle sector.

In Ladakh, however, the Indian retreat was comparatively more orderly, even though, faced by numerically superior forces, our troops had to withdraw all along the line. This orderliness in retreat and stouter resistance may be attributed to the fact that Indian troops in Ladakh had been based in the area long enough to get acclimatized to the terrain and conditions. They were also better prepared, and indeed better led.

Now, the Chinese suspended shooting, and while they regrouped their forces for the next round, Peking launched a brief "peace offensive" to fill time. On October 24, the



Chinese Government proposed talks between Chou En-lai and Nehru.

The three points of the Proposal were : (1) that both sides should withdraw 20 km. from the "line of actual control" at both ends of the Himalayan border ; (2) that they should agree not to cross that line ; and (3) that talks should be held between Nehru and Chou En-lai for a "friendly settlement" of the border dispute either in Peking or, if Nehru preferred, in New Delhi.

It was the same offer that Chou had made on September 13, which India had rejected on the ground that the withdrawal of Chinese troops from the disputed territory, so as to restore the status quo ante, had to precede any negotiations. The Chinese were now repeating that offer from a position of strength and expected a coerced India to accept it.

The Government of India rejected the proposal the same day, insisting that the Chinese troops should withdraw to the September 8, 1962 positions and emphasizing that India, while always ready to resolve differences by negotiations, could only do so "on the basis of decency, dignity and self-respect" and not while hostile troops were on her territory.

Nehru replied to Chou : "Your letter proceeds on the unilateral assumption that the line of actual control created by the latest Chinese invasion of India should be accepted as a part of the cease-fire arrangements and implemented on the ground, the boundary differences being negotiated thereafter between the two Prime Ministers. In brief, China will keep what it has secured by this further invasion and is prepared to negotiate on the rest.... This is a demand to which India will not submit, whatever the consequences and however long and hard the struggle may be.... To do otherwise would mean mere existence at the mercy of an aggressive, arrogant and expansionist neighbour."

Nehru however made a counter-proposal to Chou : "If the Chinese professions of peace and peaceful settlement of differences are really genuine, let them go back at least to the position where they were all along the boundary prior to September 8, 1962. India will then be prepared to undertake talks and discussions, at any level mutually agreed, to arrive at agreed measures which should be taken for the easing



of tension and correction of the situation created by unilateral, forcible alteration of the status quo along the India-China border."

In a letter addressed to the heads of various Governments on October 26, 1962, Nehru characterized the Chinese proposal as a "bargaining counter for dictating to India a settlement of the differences regarding the boundary on China's terms." The letter explained that China had already occupied 12,000 square miles of Indian territory in Ladakh during the five years since 1957, that Chinese forces had crossed the international frontier in the eastern sector for the first time on September 8, 1962, and that the massive invasion of October 20 was the climax to a number of probing attacks by the Chinese.

Meanwhile, this "breather" was utilized by both sides for a race for a build-up and preparation of the next round.

The Chinese were now found feverishly constructing a 15-mile road from Bum la on the border to Towang. The blasting of rock could be heard from Indian positions on this side, while our air reconnaissance observed grey patches on the track, which were interpreted as yaks whereas they were motortrucks already plying on the road under completion.

The Indians utilized the lull to converting Tse la into a "fortress," with the object of giving battle to the Chinese at that key pass on the way south.

In the first phase of the fighting, India's losses were placed at 2,000 to 2,500 men dead and missing. Since October 20, the Chinese had advanced at 13 points, and had touched soil the Chinese did not claim in only two sectors, both in Ladakh. During that period, the Chinese had seized more than 3,000 square miles of territory in Ladakh, in addition to the 12,000 square miles of strategic mountain land taken piecemeal since 1957.

The mood and temper in the country, and, particularly, in the Army, was underlined by the criticism freely voiced by Army officers to newsmen about the unhappy events in the NEFA fighting. One Army officer bitterly complained to the American UPI correspondent, "The Indian Army's mission was the defence of a political instead of a tactical position. The troops slaughtered along the Namka river were



spread out in a thin line difficult to supply and impossible to defend.”

Abe Rosenthal cabled from New Delhi on October 27 to *The New York Times* : “In the last few days New Delhi has realized with bitter astonishment that Indian troops meeting waves of attacking Chinese had been sent into battle without enough modern weapons to give them a fighting chance. Inside and outside the Army, resentment is mounting against India’s military planners, particularly against Menon.”

Krishna Menon resigned on October 30, following public pressure for his ouster from the Cabinet. Thereafter, he remained Minister of Defence Production for a week, with his responsibilities confined to the organisation of factories and workshops and research and development. But in a public statement at Tezpur, Menon claimed that the change in his portfolio signified nothing. That statement provoked yet another storm in the Congress Party and pushed him entirely out of the Government. K. Raghuramayya, till then Minister of State in the Defence Ministry, took over as Minister of Defence Production.

In a special order of the day, issued on October 30, General Thapar, Chief of the Army Staff, warned the troops : “The end is not yet. There will be fierce and more severe attacks,” and assured them that “everything possible will be done to ensure that you get everything necessary to resume the offensive.”

Now, as the NEFA front went through an uneasy lull before the storm, Tse la monopolized the limelight. It became at once the cynosure of the Indian press and people and the next objective of the enemy. While the enemy was preparing for an assault on this key pass, 13,750 ft. high, we built it up into what we thought was an impregnable fortress.

On November 15, a score of foreign and Indian Correspondents were flown all the way from New Delhi to NEFA and Indian Army officers proudly took them round the “fortress.” They averred that this time the terrain was on their side and they were fully prepared to meet the enemy.

Tse la was indeed a natural fortress, which could never easily be stormed frontally and taken—a point which the Chinese fully imbibed !



Between Towang and Tse la lay an almost impossible terrain with the grey thread of a zig-zagging road running, in between, for 50 miles, to connect the two points. From the Towang valley to Tse la, the gradient rises steeply 4,000 ft., so that the pass is perched at 13,750 ft. commanding every tactical advantage against any attacker.

Our officers confidently declared that an enemy attempting an assault on Tse la would either get a bloody nose and retreat or if he stayed overlong would be frozen to death in the oncoming winter.

We had a division in the Tse la area, with the divisional HQ and 65 Brigade, under-strength, located at Dirong Dzong, and 62 Brigade, under Brig. Hoshiara Singh, an officer with an outstanding war record, garrisoning Tse la ; and 48 Brigade under Brig. Gurbaksh Singh in Bomdi la. A 70-mile road linked Tse la with Bomdi la.

Tse la was built up with artillery, ammunition and supplies to last at least three weeks. Very, very secretly, we hauled four light tanks to Tse la—to repeat a feat the Indian Army accomplished in Zoji la in the Kashmir War, twelve years earlier. The very next morning, Peking Radio reported the arrival of the Indian tanks in Tse la ! Incidentally, the tanks were of little use in such a terrain and at that altitude, and fell an easy booty to the enemy.

The Chinese had now concentrated two divisions in the Towang-Bum la area for the next phase of their offensive, waiting for the road between Bum la and Towang to complete, in preparation for the next phase of their offensive. From Towang onwards, they had the newly-built Indian road connecting with Tse la-Bomdi la-Foothills-Tezpur.

During this intervening calm before the storm, on November 8, President Radhakrishnan himself visited the forward areas in NEFA and addressed the troops in an effort to boost up their morale. The country was bracing itself for the emergency. A Defence of India Ordinance was promulgated. An Emergency Committee was formed within the Cabinet. Several emergency Committees were also constituted within the Defence Ministry itself. T. T. Krishnamachari, till then Minister without Portfolio, was appointed Minister for Economic and Defence Co-ordination. A National



Defence Council, representative of all elements in the country, was set up.

New Delhi now feverishly negotiated with Washington and London for arms aid in order to meet adequately the impending Chinese threat. On October 26, New Delhi made an urgent appeal to the U.S.A. and U.K. for military supplies. Indeed, the first consignment of us arms arrived on November 3, even though the formal pact between the two countries was signed only on November 14.



## VII

### TRAGEDY REACHES CLIMAX

THE SECOND PHASE of the Chinese attack opened on November 14. In NEFA it took the form of a simultaneous attack in the Lohit and Kameng sectors. The Chinese now put in three divisions along the entire NEFA front.

In Ladakh, the Chinese offensive was resumed four days later, and started in the middle sector, on November 18, with an artillery barrage directed at our posts in Razang la, Gurung Hill, the Spanggur Gap and the area adjacent to the Chushul airfield.

Meanwhile, in New Delhi, Krishna Menon had resigned from the Government. Lt.-Gen. Kaul had resumed command of 4 Corps, taking over from Lt. Gen. Harbaksh Singh, who was officiating for him. The Division Commander in the Kameng sector changed, with Maj-Gen. A. S. Pathania, M.V.C., replacing Maj-Gen. Niranjana Prasad.

In the next forty-eight hours, the Chinese overran the entire area up to their claim-line in Ladakh, including Razang la Hill, the Razang Spur, Mugger Hill, dominating the Spanggur Gap, Gurung Hill, Goswami Hill, Gun Hill and Point 18300 (it has to be noted, however, that all these places are mere pinpoints, each manned by no more than 30 to 40 men).

At Razang la, the Indian force put up a gallant show, in which Maj. Shaitan Singh fought valiantly and died. Indeed, the battle of Razang la is considered a glorious chapter in the otherwise depressing story of the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962.

Yet another plucky action was the one in which the Indian garrison at Chushul flung back a series of Chinese assaults, despite constant shelling of the airstrip, and successfully held out against the enemy, when the fighting stopped on the night of November 21.

The Chinese had, by now, in two sweeps, occupied an additional 2,000 square miles of territory and overrun some 40 Indian posts roughly in a line from north to south, in the Chip Chap Valley, the Galwan Valley, the Cheng Chenmo Valley, the Pongong Lake region and the Demchok area.



In NEFA, the Chinese delivered their *coup de main*, with a massive three-prong outflanking movement designed to cut off Tse la from Dirong Zong, the Divisional HQ and from Bomdi la, and Bomdi la from Foothills. The encircling movement began on the night of November 15.

The Chinese opening assault came on the morning of November 17 at Nauranag, a forward position north of Tse la Pass. The Garhwalis stood their ground and repulsed a series of five attacks. The enemy thereupon probed yet another Indian position, east of Tse la, and pushed through the Sikhs holding it.

In the meantime, the three Chinese outflanking columns were heading for their respective three allotted objectives. One prong moved across the Palit range of mountains following a yak track, under cover of snowfall, to surprise the Tse la garrison in the rear, cutting them off from Bomdi la.

Another Chinese prong by-passed Tse la from the east and cut off the road between Tse la and Bomdi la, a few miles north of Bomdi la, and about eight road-miles to the south of Dirong Zong, the Divisional HQ of the 4th Infantry Division. This shut off the troops piled up in the north for the defence of Tse la and isolated Bomdi la.

The third prong moved further south to reach Chaku and got astride the road between Bomdi la and Foothills.

On the evening of November 17, Pathania was frantically trying to contact Kaul over the phone at the Corps HQ, but Kaul was away in Walong. Both the Army Chief and Gen. Sen, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, however, happened to be at the Corps HQ.

Pathania explained the critical situation in Tse la and sought their orders as to his next move. He expressed himself in favour of pulling out of Tse la, and asked for their permission to do so.

But neither Thapar nor Sen was prepared to give Pathania any orders and asked him to ring back when Kaul returned and to obtain his instructions from the Corps Commander.

At 1945 hours Pathania rang up again and, at last, found Kaul at the Corps HQ. He pressed Kaul for permission to withdraw 62 Brigade from Tse la to Dirong Zong, as he feared that Tse la might be cut off from Senge that night.



According to Pathania, Kaul asked him to use his judgment. He was told by Kaul that if he felt he could not hold Tse la, he was free to pull out.

But according to Kaul's version, he acquiesced in Pathania's persistent pleas most reluctantly. He says that he emphasized to Pathania the importance of holding Tse la and pointed out to him that he had sufficient strength, ammunition and supplies to hold out for at least a week, even if the enemy did succeed in cutting him off from the rear. Kaul preferred that 62 Brigade should fight it out from its position.

Following this telephonic conversation, Kaul sent Pathania that same night the following written orders.\*

- "(a) You will hold on to your present position to the best of your ability.
- "(b) When any position becomes untenable, I delegate the authority to you to withdraw to any alternative position you can hold.
- "(c) Approximately 400 enemy have cut the road Bomdi La-Dirong Zong.
- "(d) I have ordered Commander 48 Brigade at Bomdi la to attack the enemy force to-night speedily and resolutely and keep this road clear at all costs.
- "(e) You may be cut off by the enemy at Senge.
- "(f) Reinforcements of two battalions will reach Bomdi la by 18th morning.
- "(g) Use your tanks and other supporting arms to the fullest extent to clear your lines of communication."

Pathania was of course grateful to Kaul that the latter had at least given him some orders on his next move at Tse la, and particularly because he had left to Pathania's judgment what should be done. Pathania obviously utilized the discretion left to him to pull 62 Brigade out of Tse la immediately.

When 62 Brigade moved out of Tse la that evening and was on its way to Dirong Zong, they found the Chinese across the road, firing machine guns and mortars at them. Suffering

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\* Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul, *The Untold Story*.



many casualties, the Indian troops got disorganized in the gathering dusk and wildly dispersed into the jungles, leaving behind arms and ammunition and wireless sets.

Tse la was given up without resistance, according to Kaul, who put the blame for the disaster squarely on Pathania.

The garrison in Tse la was of brigade-strength, well-stocked with rations and ammunition, with four light tanks to support it. If only they had the will to fight, they could have comfortably held out against the enemy for at least one full day, if not two.

In a discussion with me Pathania himself denied that the enemy had numerical superiority in this battle. He said that in numbers the two sides were equally matched, as there was a division on each side. "But for some mysterious reason, the ranks had no morale whatsoever," rued Pathania. He had asked for two more brigades, but got only one brigade, and before that arrived, the Chinese encirclement had begun. The Chinese came to Tse la with a brigade plus. We too had a brigade in Tse la, a brigade in Bomdi la, and one weak brigade at the Divisional HQ at Dirong Zong.

In their opening attack at Nauranag, the Chinese came disguised in "lama dress"—flowing red robes, high Tibetan boots and fur-lined caps, so as to be mistaken for the local Buddhist Monpa tribals. "Looking like innocent tribesmen, they came 100-strong, making towards Nauranag," reminisced Subedar Pratap Singh of Garhwal Rifles. "But when they got to within 40 to 50 yards, they whipped out their weapons from under their lama robes and started firing.

"This was followed by further waves of Chinese. Indian troops shot them down as they came in bunches. The Subedar's men were scattered and were in dug-in positions and shell-proof bunkers. By 1300 hours, the Chinese attacked four times, each successive attack was larger. In the fourth attack, a Chinese carrying a Bren-gun was shot. Hordes of Chinese descended on him to retrieve the gun. The jawans kept on firing but despite Indian mortar fire, they recaptured the gun. After the attack, the valley was littered with Chinese bodies.

"After the fourth attack, the estimated Chinese dead were 300. There was now a brief lull, which presumably the



Chinese utilized to regroup and reinforce.

"The Chinese mounted the fifth attack with heavy artillery fire. Shells fell like hail, making holes in the ground, sometimes four feet deep. During the fifth attack, one of the Chinese party with a light machine-gun got into the cook-house flank. The cook-house was in the rear position. Indian mortars showered shells on the cook-house, killing one Chinese. Two or three still lingering on, were killed in a hand-to-hand fight.

"At 1530 hours, the Subedar got orders to withdraw to the main defensive position at Tse la, which he did by the following morning.

"Subedar Pratap Singh averred he withdrew not because of the Chinese pressure, but because he was ordered to withdraw to prevent his company being cut off from Tse la. This was the Subedar's first experience of war."

The above PTI dispatch is quoted in full to underline two aspects of the NEFA fighting in 1962 : First, that whenever the Indian troops stood up and fought back, they performed creditably and proved that the Chinese were no supermen. Second, the story underlined the Chinese scant regard for human life and gave a vivid idea of the Chinese "human wave" tactics.

It also indicated that if only the commanders had not lost their nerve, many of the junior officers and lower units of the Indian Army were prepared to stand up and fight the Chinese—and, indeed, they rendered an excellent account of themselves in whatever little fighting they did—and perhaps might have averted the ignominious disaster.

The ignominy of the disaster lay not in the Indian Army's retreat—retreat or advance is all part of the game called war. The Indian people were shocked and hung down their heads when they found that that retreat had degenerated into a disorderly rout, that our men did not give battle and just ran.

I came across many young officers involved in the Tse la-Bomdi la fighting of 1962 who insisted that they received orders for withdrawal at a moment when they were locked in battle and were flinging back the enemy, giving and taking casualties, without a thought of retreat.



In the opinion of most of these officers, stated a dispatch from the special Correspondent of *The Leader* of Allahabad, after a visit to the NEFA front immediately after the debacle, the withdrawal was made earlier than necessary. Company Commanders, in many instances, rallied their men and mounted counter-attacks, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy after the withdrawal orders had been received.

Though outnumbered by the Chinese troops swarming all over, the Correspondent wrote, the jawans fighting from dug-in positions, had a tactical advantage and felt they could have held their ground if they had been ordered to fight it out.

It turned out, however, that the senior officers, starting with the Divisional Commander, were suddenly seized with a single passion to run, and it infected many men further down, as such an impulse could be dangerously infectious. Thus, they refused to face the enemy and the units disintegrated and dispersed helter-skelter into the jungles, leaving behind large dumps of provisions and ammunition and weapons for the enemy's benefit.

On November 18, when an attempt was made to shoot through the Chinese road-block between Bomdi la and Tse la, the task was entrusted to six light tanks from both ends, but the tanks were given no infantry support. Now, tanks are worse than useless without infantry support, and proved "sitting ducks" to the enemy.

Indian troops being all committed to face the enemy onslaught on Tse la, they could not be redeployed to mount an offensive on the Chinese outflanking spearhead. This spearhead cut off the strategic supply route from Bomdi la to Tse la, leading to a chaotic withdrawal from Tse la and Dirong Zong through the wooded valleys.

Indian forces retreating southwards from Bomdi la were also thrown into disorder by a Chinese ambush at Chaku, a hamlet four miles north of Foothills. A large convoy loaded with food and ammunition was abandoned on the road as the drivers sought safety in the jungles.

Thus, on November 18, the "impregnable fort" of Tse la fell like a rotten apple into the enemy's lap. The next day, the Chinese took Bomdi la.

Stocks left behind after the cease-fire and the Indian with-



drawal were computed as enough to sustain 25,000 Chinese soldiers for nearly two weeks. Bales of knitted woollen wear that had been air-dropped and were awaiting distribution to jawans, also fell into enemy hands.

Disorganized activity and absence of co-ordinated effort, rather than lack of men and material, marked the closing phase of the military operations in NEFA after November 18.

In the meantime, fierce fighting was going on in Walong, in the Lohit sector, where a brigade (11 Brigade) was struggling to stop the onrushing tide of a full Chinese division.

The other brigade (5 Brigade) of this Division (2nd Infantry Division) was keeping vigil in the central sector of the NEFA front ; however there was little action there. The 2nd Infantry Division was commanded by another Pathania, Maj.-Gen. M. S. Pathania.

The 11 Brigade, under Brig. "Naween" Rawlley had walked non-stop for two days to reach their positions in Walong. The Indian forces here put up the stiffest resistance. They repulsed 15 attacks one after the other, killed 5,000 Chinese and slowed down the enemy progress southwards.

Here again, the Chinese numerical superiority ultimately decided the issue, and 11 Brigade had finally to abandon Walong on November 17. Brig. Rawlley and his men took to the jungles.

In Walong, though put to an impossible and tactically wrong task of holding an untenable position, the Indian forces rendered a creditable account of themselves, taking and giving heavy casualties and then withdrawing in a fairly orderly manner.

The Chinese blitzkrieg in NEFA had an electrifying effect on the Indian people. By November 21, the Chinese invaders broke through the last line of Indian defences between Bomdi la and Foothills and almost reached the edge of the Assam plains. They were now 40 miles from the Brahmaputra and Tezpur, and within 85 miles of the Digboi oilfields.

The fear that the Chinese might overrun all of Assam gripped New Delhi. The Chief of the Army Staff, Gen. Thapar, resigned, and was replaced by Gen. J. N. Chaudhuri, then GOC-in-C, Southern Command and who was on the verge of retirement. Lt.-Gen. Maneckshaw displaced Lt.-Gen. Kaul,



as Commander of 4 Corps. The 4th Infantry Division had disintegrated in the NEFA jungles. The 2nd Infantry Division had been badly bruised.

On November 19, New Delhi made an urgent and specific request to the U.S.A. for American fighting air support. Before Washington replied, however, Peking announced a unilateral cease-fire. According to one British observer, Nehru asked U.S.A. and U.K. for 15 bomber squadrons to interdict the advancing Chinese troops in NEFA.

In five days, the Chinese had advanced 160 miles from Jang, to 4 miles short of Foothills, through Tse la and Bomdi la, to reach their claim-line in the Kameng Division of NEFA. They had performed a prodigious feat in constructing a 15-mile road from Bum la to Towang in 18 days in an impossible ridge-ridden terrain, reaching 17,000 ft. in height at points, and bringing up artillery and 120 mm. mortars.

Simultaneously, on the Lohit sector, the Chinese had marched 80 miles from Walong to the vicinity of Hayuliang, down the Lohit river valley, to reach their claim-line at the eastern end of NEFA.

The Chinese claim-line in NEFA runs from the South-eastern tip of Bhutan eastwards along the southern foot of the Himalayas and follows the lower reaches of the Lohit river until it reaches the tri-junction of India, Tibet and Burma.

According to Polish press reports from Peking, some 15,000 Chinese soldiers died in the campaign. Several thousands of the Chinese simply perished in the snow for want of warm clothing.

The official estimates of Indian casualties, as released to Parliament, were 6,765 since October 20, including 224 killed and 468 wounded. The figure under the head "missing" and "taken prisoner" would therefore be around 6,000. On November 16, the Chinese had claimed to have captured 927 Indian prisoners, including one brigadier and 16 other officers.

Having wreaked so much havoc in so short a time and inflicted a deep humiliation on India, China gave her no time to recover from the shock and stagger to her feet and fight back. On the night of November 20-21 Peking declared a unilateral "cease-fire."



The announcement said that beginning from 00.00 hours on November 22, the Chinese "Frontier Guards" would cease fire. Beginning from December 1, 1962, the Chinese "Frontier Guards" would withdraw 20 km. (12 miles) behind the "line of actual control" on November 7, 1959.

A Maoist dictum says : "Attack when sure of victory, then establish truce. After we have repulsed the attack . . . and before they launch a new one, we should stop at the proper moment and bring that particular fight to a close . . . . Herein lies the temporary nature of every particular struggle."

And so Peking decided to cry off at the peak of its triumph, and before that triumph had soured in its mouth.

The Defence Correspondent of the London *Times* characterized the Chinese gesture as "demonstrating to India and the world that they were able to make any border adjustments which they may think necessary whenever they desire and they can now retire to conduct negotiations from strength."

During this brief, hectic war—in which the actual fighting did not spread over more than ten days—the Chinese had traversed in the NEFA area nearly 200 miles south from the McMahon Line, to the rim of the Assam plains, to reach their claim-line at the foothills in the Kameng Division.

In the Lohit Division, at the other end of NEFA, they had descended some 100 miles southwards and southwestwards, from Kibitoo to Walong, and thence to Hayuliang. They had reached a point some 85 miles from the Digboi oil fields.

In the Subansiri and Siang Divisions, in the middle sector of NEFA, the Chinese did not advance more than 30 or 40 miles at the most, at a few selected points across the McMahon Line. The Tiraf Division of NEFA, which lies along the Burmese border, in the extreme east, remained untouched, as it has no common border with China.

In the Kameng sector, where the Chinese made the deepest penetration, they had advanced along a 30-mile front, from the Bhutan border to Bum la up to Towang. According to Dr. B. N. Ganguli, Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, the Chinese followed the route chalked out in a railway network blueprint prepared by Dr. Sun Yat Sen, which showed a Chinese Railway route ending at Towang !



From Towang, the Chinese hit the road to Foothills, via Tse la and Bomdi la—which suggested that they were more concerned with reaching their claim-line than capturing territory.

The Chinese objective in Ladakh appeared to be to extend and consolidate the occupation of the entire area of 14,000 square miles claimed by them.



## VIII

### WHERE EVERYTHING WENT WRONG

THIS WAS a war in which everything went awry for India. Our Army was psychologically unprepared and caught on the wrong foot. It was outnumbered, outweaponed and outgeneralled.

In the Kameng sector, in particular, literally everything went wrong. There was little evidence of well-thought-out tactics and strategy. Commanders were changed again and again. Forward formations complained of interference from New Delhi even in such matters as disposition of troops. They further complained of receiving erratic orders from the Corps HQ.

The Government chose the wrong place when it ordered the Army to fight the Chinese at Dhola. This was done against the advice of the military leaders.

The Government chose the wrong time to fight back the Chinese encroaching upon Indian territory, when it knew too well that militarily the country was not prepared for such a venture.

When the Chinese launched their massive attack on Dhola on October 20, the outnumbered, defending garrison was on austerity rations and short of ammunition, boots and winter clothing, and bereft of heavy arms.

Indian troops on the NEFA front were short of digging tools and their weapons and ammunition and wireless sets were defective, according to Kaul. They were short of helicopters in a rugged, roadless terrain where casualties must be evacuated by air.

According to Kaul, again, our organizations and establishments were unsuited, in weapons, equipment and logistics, for mountain warfare.

A brigade strewn over the entire Thagla-Dhola area had to face the weight of a full Chinese division, supported by artillery and heavy mortars.

And, as if that was not bad enough, when the Chinese offensive reopened on the NEFA border, the Indian forces found themselves leaderless, with their Corps Commander



lying ill in far-away New Delhi.

The various commanders at brigade, divisional, corps and Army level were found at sixes and sevens with each other. A. S. Pathania took over from Niranjana Prasad the command of the 4th Infantry Division, while Umrao Singh, Commander of 33 Corps, was pushed out of the fighting front, along with his corps, to make room for Kaul's 4 Corps. The antipathy between the new Corps commander and the Army Commander was even more intense than that between the Indian and Chinese armies !

We were psychologically and militarily so thoroughly unprepared for war that there were not even enough number of maps to go round and some of those supplied to our forward commanders were incorrect. Thus, in these maps, the river Namka was shown as running north to south, whereas it ran west to east.

A striking example of the incongruity that underlined the psychological unpreparedness among the army officer-ranks was the report that mess silver, carpets and commodes were carried forward to the divisional headquarters in the Kameng sector.

Here is another example. An urgent request for the immediate dispatch of a Gurkha battalion to the Dhola area to help deal with the investing Chinese force was rejected by the Eastern Command because it would interfere with the Dussera celebrations that day !

Whereas, the Chinese brought four divisions to the NEFA front, we had less than a division (two brigades and one battalion) to pit against them, at the outset. This strength was painfully raised to two weak divisions half-way through this lightning war, with the second division, comprising two brigades and a battalion, flung into the fighting in the Walong, Siang and Subansiri sectors.

When the fighting ended abruptly on November 21, we had just managed to move in a third division (5th).

In such desperate straits, not to have used the airforce in a tactical role was indeed a major blunder—in a similar circumstance, in the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict, Shastri did not hesitate to fling in the IAF in support of the hard pressed ground forces in the Chhamb sector, which made all the



difference between victory and defeat in the entire war.

In the Kameng sector, in particular, a tactical use of the air force was warranted, but lack of intelligence made us exaggerate the enemy air strength, which kept us from introducing aircover out of fear of massive retaliation from the enemy. Later intelligence, in collaboration with us reports, proved that the Chinese, at the time, had poor air-retaliation capability.

Disruption of the chain of command was another cause of discontent and confusion. There were occasions when the Army HQ tried to run even brigades and battalions directly on its own, bypassing the Command headquarters.

For example, early in September, the Army HQ from New Delhi directly ordered Lt.-Col. Misra, the battalion commander in Dhola, to capture the area Thag la-Yam la-Karpo la by September 19. Maj.-Gen. Niranjan Prasad, the divisional commander, protested against the order being issued over his head.

Then again, differences and friction erupted between Lt.-Gen. Umrao Singh, 33 Corps Commander, and Lt.-Gen. Sen, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, over tactical matters and the former complained of interference by the latter. Umrao Singh was moved out of the NEFA front.

When a special new corps (4 Corps) was formed to carry out the task of "throwing the Chinese out," its commander, Kaul, stoked resentments around him when he directly communicated with New Delhi, ignoring the Army Command, his immediate superior echelon.

In Dhola, where the fighting first sparked, our troops lacked heavy weapons, which were still on the way from Towang, being manhandled to their destination. They had however to be hauled back to Towang, as Dhola fell before the artillery pieces got there. On the other hand, the Chinese had managed to bring with them artillery and heavy mortars on mule-back.

For lack of roads, our forces in forward areas had to depend upon air supply for sustenance, which process proved not only costly but woefully inadequate and ineffective. Many of the supply-drops fell into inaccessible areas and sometimes in enemy territory.



On the other side, the Chinese forces were well prepared—indeed, had been preparing over a considerable period of time. They were backed by a network of excellent roads and airfields. Their lines of communication were no more than two to four miles from the front.

Their key road, adjacent to the McMahon Line, could carry five-ton trucks and was connected to three airfields. Le, their base on the other side of the line, was just ten miles from the front. In contrast, our nearest roadhead was sixty miles behind at Towang.

The Chinese were armed with automatics and recoilless guns and artillery and heavy mortars, whereas Indian forces were mainly armed with the outmoded .303 rifle, with no heavy weapons whatsoever to support them, in the earlier phase of the fighting.

Indian survivors again and again stressed the shock power of an attack by hundreds of massed Chinese and the bewilderment caused by their lightning enveloping movements. In the mountains, the Chinese had hundreds of mortars—the use of which they had perfected in the Korean War. Indian officers said that the mortars were the most effective Chinese weapons.

In contrast to the vagueness of our strategic and tactical objectives, the Chinese forces knew exactly where they were headed and why, and they went all out to attain those objectives, uninhibited by any political considerations.

The Fourth Infantry Division—a Division with a great name—was the “Fighting Fourth” only in name, when it was posted to NEFA. It was now composed of newly-attached brigades who had yet to develop cohesion and get used to each other and their main command. And then the Division swapped horses midstream when it changed its commander almost on the eve of the Chinese offensive. Indeed, the Chinese jeered at the division, asking what happened now to the “Famous Fourth” which had defeated the Germans.

A. S. Pathania—who won the MVC in the Zoji la action in 1948—took over command of the Division from Niranjana Prasad on October 24. When he took command, his Division comprised of just two brigades and a battalion.

Discussing the battle of Tse la with me, Pathania com-



plained, "There was all-round demoralization from the outset—possibly because of a feeling that they had been given a task which was so obviously impossible. It was a hodge-podge division, with battalions mixed up which had never worked together before. They were neither acclimatized nor equipped for high-altitude fighting."

Pathania however conceded that he had ammunition for three days and rations for six days at Tse la when the Chinese attacked.

His Corps Commander, Kaul, held Pathania solely responsible for the Tse la debacle. Kaul said Pathania lost his nerve and all the time seemed concerned to pull Hoshiara Singh's brigade from Tse la to Dirong Zong, his Divisional HQ, so as to give himself greater protection.

If only Pathania had held out for a day, the story of Tse la might have been different, as the Chinese attack would have got blunted, and the defenders could have broken through and ultimately might have even saved Bomdi la.

Pathania himself was frank enough to tell me that it was not correct to say that the enemy came to Tse la in superior numbers. He said the enemy had no more than a brigade against our one brigade, which, besides, had for once been well provided in the Tse la "fortress" in rations, weapons and ammunition.

On the other hand, Pathania had his own catalogue of grievances against his superiors. He said that to the end they were not clear about the main strategic objective. Nor had a decision been taken as to where the main effort should be : whether in Kameng or in Walong.

"They planned first, and then did the appreciation," he complained. "Kaul could not take decisions, and when taken, they were vague." On that critical October 17, the Corps Commander was not at all available until late in the evening for consultation and orders.

Pathania denied Kaul's charge against him that he (Pathania) had ordered Hoshiara Singh to withdraw from Tse la that night. He maintained that Hoshiara Singh had withdrawn because Kaul had earlier told them that Hoshiara Singh might have to withdraw from Tse la and must keep ready for such an eventuality.



Hoshiara Singh's last words to Pathania over the phone were : "Something has gone wrong at Tse la. I am going down there myself." This was at 5 a.m. November 18. Pathania never saw Hoshiara after that. Pathania also complained that local commanders withdrew without orders.

He recalled how he had reported at Dirong Zong on October 24, as commander of the 4th Division, without any directive from the Army Chief, without adequate number of men, and without essential equipment such as digging tools, wireless sets, ammunition and rations. A battalion of the Sikh Light Infantry had been flown to the Himalayan front all the way from hot and humid Goa and plunged into action. Pathania had asked for two more brigades, but got only one, but before it arrived, the Chinese encirclement had begun.

Speaking of the Chinese outflanking tactics at Tse la, Pathania revealed that two companies of Rajputs from their position on the left flank of Tse la, had noticed on the night of November 17, a line of moving torches on the opposite ridge—they were the Chinese, in battalion strength, skirting the gorge to get behind Tse la.

The two companies did not react nor did they report to the Division HQ because their wireless set was not functioning—most wireless sets were not functioning in this campaign, and, besides, the Indian units were always short of batteries.

Hoshiara Singh had moved overnight two companies of 2nd Sikhs from the ridge, and as they withdrew they were followed by the Chinese. Early in the morning, the Sikhs and the Chinese were locked in hand-to-hand fighting.

On the vital morning of November 18, communications had broken down with Tezpur, so that there was no contact between the divisional and corps headquarters. On November 19, Bomdi la fell before Pathania reached there with his battalion, and thereupon he and his men had to trek 120 miles to Foothills.

The casual manner in which a new corps was announced and its commander appointed was even more astounding. According to Kaul himself, he was informed of his appointment by the Army Chief at 2100 hours on October 3. Kaul flew to Tezpur the next morning to take command of a 400-mile front and assume charge of a non-existent corps, with



no staff and with just two brigades under it (whereas, normally, a Corps commands at least six to nine brigades). Kaul had neither a communications set-up nor other essential adjuncts of a corps HQ, such as artillery, engineer, transport and supply units in support.

Kaul's immediate mandate was to evict the Chinese from the Dhola-Thag la area. But Kaul returned from a visit to the Dhola area to report to the Government and Army HQ that the task given to him could not be carried out.

The complaint against Kaul as corps commander was that he was seldom available at the corps HQ for directions and consultations. He was most of the time away in the forward areas.

In his defence, Kaul has quoted the example of the American General Patton in World War II. That was also true of the great German General, Field Marshal Rommel, who spent most of his time with the forward troops. But then, whenever Rommel went forward, he took with him his wireless van and kept full grip on the operations on the entire front. Besides, when he went forward to a particular sector more often than not he personally took command and directed the operation.

The charge against Kaul was that most of the time he was "rubber-necking" in the forward areas, often proving a distraction to a busy forward commander. Kaul's action, at the height of the crisis, in shifting his corps HQ from Tezpur to Gauhati (and then back to Tezpur) contributed greatly to the demoralisation and confusion among the military personnel and panic among the civilian population, leading to large-scale evacuation by the people of Tezpur.

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The summary of the Henderson Brooks report, as presented to Parliament by Defence Minister Y. B. Chavan, admits that the training of our troops was not oriented towards the terrain and fighting conditions demanded in the heights of NEFA. Nor did that training have a "slant for a war being launched by China." "Thus our troops had no requisite knowledge of the Chinese tactics and ways of war, their weapons, equip-



ment and capabilities," stated the report. The truth was that our Army was solely and completely Pakistan-oriented. Conventional, unimaginative tactics employed by the Indian Army were of no avail against the unorthodox methods of the Chinese. Nor were there adequate quantities of barbed wire and mines to obstruct the "human waves" launched by the Chinese on thinly-manned Indian positions.

The report also stressed that the need of the moment was training in leadership. The inquiry confirmed that there was an overall shortage of equipment both for training and during operations.

The logistical problem, difficult enough, was aggravated by the overall shortage of vehicles, "as our fleet was too old and its efficiency not adequate for operating on steep gradients and mountain terrain."

The Henderson Brooks report also commented upon the system of command and pointed out, "Difficulties arose only when there was departure from the accepted chain of command" though the report hastened to add, "such departure occurred mainly due to haste and lack of adequate prior planning."

The report further mildly censured the practice in the higher Army formations of interfering in tactical matters even to the extent of detailing troops for specified tasks. "It is the duty of commanders in the field to make on-the-spot decisions, when so required, and details of operations ought to have been left to them."

Speaking of the physical fitness of the troops, the report confessed: "Among some middle-age group officers, there had been deterioration in standards of physical fitness." It added, "Physical fitness among junior officers was good."

As to the capacity of commanders, it is significant that the Henderson Brooks report remarks: "It was at higher levels that shortcomings became more apparent." It was also revealed that some of the higher commanders did not depend enough on the initiative of the lower commanders, who alone could have the requisite knowledge of the terrain and local conditions of troops under them.

As to Staff work and procedures, the inquiry commented: "One major lesson learnt is that the quality of General Staff



work, and the depth of its prior planning in time, is going to be one of the most crucial factors in our future preparedness."

Speaking of Staff work in general, here is a gross example of bad organization. During the operation in 1962, it was felt necessary to relocate an operational administrative centre.\* According to regulations, such a unit should be capable of movement within an hour. When attempts were made to make the move one morning, no convoy could be organized. Till the evening, the requisite number of vehicles could not be mustered.

The big move began the next day, and after a long drive, the convoy with its precious cargo was stranded for hours on a river bank, while desperate attempts were made to organize a fleet of boats to make the crossing. Twenty-four hours after the relocation was effected, the administrative unit was ordered back to its original site, with a directive to stay put!

The missing of connecting trains, splitting of units in the course of transportation and the separation of the men from their equipment were frequent and typical instances of poor staff work and organization on the part of a military apparatus so renowned in the country for its efficiency in such matters.

Mobility of Indian troops was to some extent affected by heavy personal equipment. It was quite usual to see a jawan assigned to NEFA from a regimental centre disembark with about 70 lbs. of personal baggage and combat equipment. Officers brought trunks, suitcases, bulky holdalls, besides camp kit and, in some cases, attachee-cases too.

It has to be noted that the Henderson Brooks report, as summarized by the Defence Ministry, is a masterpiece of circumlocutory understatement. Thus, commenting upon direction of operations, the report states: "Even the largest and the best equipped of armies need to be given proper policy guidance and major directives by the Government, whose instrument it is. These must bear a reasonable relation to the size of the army and state of its equipment from time to time."

In other words, the report points at a fatal hiatus between the Government's policies and military capabilities to back those policies.

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\* A dispatch, datelined Tezpur December 22, 1962, published in the "Leader" of Allahabad, from its Special Correspondent.



The report concludes that in the 1962 war with China, only about 24,000 of our troops were actually involved in the fighting. Of these, those in Ladakh did an excellent job even when overwhelmed and outnumbered. In the Eastern sector, though the troops had to withdraw in the face of vastly superior enemy strength, they withdrew from Walong in an orderly manner and took their toll of the enemy, but in the Kameng sector they suffered a series of disastrous reverses.

Why in the Kameng sector alone the Army's performance was so shocking, the Defence Minister's summary of the Henderson Brooks report does not dilate upon. It is obvious that the original report has a lot to say about it, as indeed it is the happenings in the Kameng sector that provoked the inquiry. But unfortunately, it is this very portion of the report that has been concealed from the public—an act both unstatesmanlike and undemocratic on the part of the Government.

Younger officers (*i.e.* upto the rank of major) came back from the front very bitter, with a feeling of being let down by the Government. This feeling was intensified by the avoidable physical travails they had been put to, thanks to the mistakes committed, and poor leadership, in the higher echelons. Further, they altogether lacked confidence in the higher military leadership. This is typified by the story told me by Maj-Gen. A. S. Pathania himself, and confirmed by some others.

Pathania said that on the evening of October 29, when the officers clustered round the radio set and heard the announcement that Gen. Kaul was now fit and had resumed charge of 4 Corps, they spontaneously exclaimed : "He has come back ? Now, God save us !" Nor was the image of the Army Chief very inspiring in the eyes of the junior officers and troops. Their Divisional Commander on the spot, proved an even poorer leader of men in the field.

Yet another cause of the low morale of the troops at Tse la was the incessant panicky chatter of the hordes of retreating men from the front. When they passed through Tse la and arrived in Tezpur, they mixed with fresh troops on their way to the front and retailed to them scare-stories about the Chinese : their fierce tactics and mass techniques of fighting,



duly exaggerated so as to justify their own poor performance in battle. In no time, the fresh arrivals got infected by the panic and demoralization, which permeated the retreating "veterans."

That did not happen in Walong, which was inaccessible and too far away from Tezpur, the buzzing gossip-market, for the wild stories to reach the ears of the men fighting in that sector.

Apart from the bad reverses suffered at Dhola and Towang, two other factors have been quoted by those on the spot as the cause of the troops' low morale in the Tse la and Bomdi la battles. They are :

(a) A widespread feeling that they had been let down by the higher authorities in New Delhi—a feeling stemming from the shocking inadequacies the troops suffered from in the matter of rations, clothing and ammunition, and a consciousness that they had been callously asked to do the impossible—to fight against a numerically superior and infinitely better equipped and armed enemy, from positions of great disadvantage to themselves.

(b) A lack of confidence in the military leadership right from the Army HQ at the top down to the Corps, division and brigade level.

That the Army had gone soft and rusty, since the Kashmir fighting of thirteen years ago—a fact admitted by the Henderson Brooks report—was another stark reality. During the long interregnum, the Army had been neglected, ignored and starved of funds by a politicians' government. And in the process, its officer personnel had developed a Cinderella complex which did not help to build up into them the aplomb and aggressive spirit so essential in leaders of men in the field of battle.

Perhaps it would be relevant to quote what Field Marshal Rommel, has to say about the relationship between commanders in the field and their men:

"It is tremendously important to realize the attitude of the soldier to war," Rommel wrote. "A man leaving his home and family today to do his duty under the most terrible conditions at the front, does so in a fine spirit of idealism, and commanders of men must be under no illusion about this.



Officers must therefore do all they can to maintain and preserve this idealism in the men . . . . The soldier must continually receive fresh justification for his confidence, otherwise it is soon lost. He must go into battle easy in mind and with no doubt about the command under which he is fighting.”\*

Concluding his statement while presenting the summary of the Henderson Brooks report, Defence Minister Chavan assured Parliament that his Ministry had not waited for that report to be in their hands to take corrective action. He said the process of taking corrective action had started simultaneously with the institution of the inquiry.

The triple process of reorganization, reorientation and expansion of the Indian Army was accelerated following the receipt of the Henderson Brooks report. I have come across some encouraging evidence of the high state of preparedness to meet any new Chinese threat on the NEFA front. We have in Lt.-Gen. S. H. F. J. Manekshaw, GOC-in-c, Eastern Command, an outstanding soldier, who knows his job. Talking to Manekshaw about the military problems on the north-eastern border is a tonic experience.

Knowledgeable foreign military observers have testified to the enormous headway the Indian Army has made since Mao gave them a few hard knocks in the autumn of 1962. Indeed, Harrison E. Salisbury in his series of articles in the *New York Times*, following a tour of India and other countries on the periphery of China, wrote :

“On the Himalayan front, foreign observers believe, India is now equal of any force the Chinese are likely to mount. ‘Indians have the capability now to contain anything the Chinese attempt short of a massive land and air invasion,’ said one of the best informed military men in India.”

In his subsequent book *Orbit of China*, Salisbury quotes an American specialist to say that “they (Indians) were the finest, toughest, hardiest, best-equipped mountain troops in the world . . . They were capable of containing any attack the Chinese might mount,” Robert McNamara, U.S. Defence Secretary in his annual review for 1968, placed India in

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\* Liddel Hart (ed.) *The Rommel Papers*.



the first position as a military power in Asia outside the Communist orbit. He stated, "As against a total of 2.3 million Chinese forces, with a limited ability to attack beyond their borders, Indian troops now number 1.1 million men who should be able to defend their country against Chinese aggression." McNamara further said that Indian forces now have more firepower per man than the Chinese, and "with vastly improved communications and transportation, can move quickly to reinforce critical areas."\*

With a network of 5,000 miles of inter-connecting highways constructed along the northern border, India would now be in a better position to shift troops swiftly front to front. A repetition of the Chinese trick cannot therefore now succeed in that the Chinese could never any more achieve the surprise element that they did in 1962. Our troops are very much there, now fully prepared to withstand any Chinese attack. They are duly acclimatized, adequately clothed and armed, with their logistical problems solved to a large extent. And what is more, their tails are up.

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\*H. R. Vohra in despatch in "*The Times of India*," dated February 15, 1968.



## IX

### THE METHOD IN THE MADNESS

WHY DID the Chinese halt in their victorious march ?

There were many good reasons why. The Chinese, of course, claim that they were acting purely in self-defence, and there was no need for further action once the aggression had been repelled.

One, however, discerned a streak of desperation about the Chinese unilateral declaration of cease-fire. Their unseemly hurry suggested that the sands were running out for their campaign, that they had to put a stop to it, before things went out of hand. It looked as though they came upon unexpected developments which made them think and pause in their step.

It would appear that the Chinese initially expected that at the first touch of military reverses, India would collapse and sue for peace, so that the war they had ignited would be over in a jiffy ; that they would finish the job before the world woke up and reacted to the event.

Their expectations were based on reports of political conditions received from their diplomats and agents in New Delhi, Calcutta and elsewhere in India, which had assured them that forces of disintegration had gripped this nation. India was said to be on its last legs, ripe for an internal communist revolution, if only aided by a timely external "push" from a sympathetic, contiguous Communist power.

The Chinese found, to their chagrin, that it did not work that way. Far from disintegrating, the dire threat to their security and very existence stung the Indian nation into unprecedented unity and patriotic fervour. In Parliament the ruling party and the Opposition joined together to adopt an unanimous resolution proclaiming the nation's solemn determination not to rest until the aggressor was expelled from Indian soil. Even the Indian Communists joined in that pledge and condemned Chinese aggression against India. This spectacle was an eye-opener to Peking.

Following India's rejection of the October 24 offer, caught in the logic of its action, Peking resumed its offensive and inflicted crushing reverses on India at Tse la and Bomdi la.



By November 20, the Chinese forces had almost arrived in Foothills, some forty miles from Tezpur, thereby reaching their claim-line in NEFA. On the night of November 21, the Chinese unilaterally declared a cease-fire ; this time giving India no chance to reject their offer.

The cease-fire declaration threatened India with resumption of hostilities if Indian forces should advance to the McMahon Line or occupy the Thag la and Longju areas in the Eastern sector ; if, in the middle sector, Indian forces should fail to withdraw 20 km. or continue to administer Barahoti ; and if, in the western sector, Indian forces should fail to withdraw 20 km. or if they should attempt to re-occupy the 43 defensive posts overrun by the Chinese during their latest aggression.

Under the declaration, China claimed in the western sector that the position reached as a result of this aggression was the line up to which it had exercised actual control as far back as November 1959. And Peking demanded that India should withdraw 20 km. farther into her own territory.

Why this haste to terminate a campaign they themselves had wantonly launched ?

Firstly, because it was now already November. The Himalayan winter was round the corner. Soon, the impenetrable white curtain of snow would descend on the scene. The Chinese had to take a quick decision : should they continue the campaign right down to the Indian plains, with the Chinese lines of communication inordinately distended and soon to be choked off by the snows ? Or should they call it a day at a propitious moment and capitalize on their gains and impose a political settlement on a humiliated India, instead of gambling away those gains in further action far inside the enemy country and running the risk of getting bogged down into a long-term war ? Peking was far from prepared for the latter contingency, with so many grave and urgent problems harassing the Government at home and elsewhere.

The Anglo-American offer of immediate military aid was yet another serious intimidatory factor. On November 3, the first plane-loads of us Army supplies landed at Dum Dum—a concrete warning to China to desist.

Indeed, USA, Britain, Canada and Australia had sponta-



neously offered military aid to India to fight the Chinese invasion. As many as 75 countries had given India their moral support.

The tide of world opinion was rising in censure against the Chinese aggression on India. Unfriendly reactions were more widespread than Peking had calculated, endangering China's image as a peace-loving nation. Indeed, many in the Communist bloc, including Soviet Russia, had expressed their strong disapproval of Chinese adventurism against India.

Gravely preoccupied with the Cuba contretemps at that moment, the Soviet Union at first advised India to open talks with China and endorsed Peking's October proposals. It was, however, subsequently disclosed that Khrushchev was furious at Mao Tse-tung for trying to upset his apple-cart. The Soviet disapproval of China's action amounted to censure and proved to be the first major fissure in the relations between the two leading Communist countries. Indeed, Khrushchev wrote to Nehru stating that India's obtaining arms aid from the USA to defend herself against China would not be misconstrued by the Soviet Union.

Incidentally, India also discovered that when the chips were down there were not many among her Afro-Asian friends who were prepared to stand up and be counted on her side against China. India found more sympathizers among the Communist countries.

Of the fifty-five Afro-Asian countries, only two spontaneously offered support to India, while only eighteen showed sympathy after a good deal of Indian prodding.

Meanwhile, the Chinese had in any case reached their claim-line in the NEFA front. In the western sector, their short-term objective—the possession of the entire Aksai Chin area—had been attained. Further advance into India would be even more difficult to justify in the eyes of the world.

All these factors induced the Chinese to stop a dangerous adventure they had embarked upon, before things began to go wrong for them. Since they could not rely on Nehru to consent to a cease-fire on mutually agreed terms—nor was there much time left to waste in negotiating—Peking decided to announce a unilateral cease-fire on November 21, giving out their own terms for a settlement.



But the question still remains : why did the Chinese start the war ?

Right through their diplomatic manoeuvres and negotiations with India over the Indo-Tibetan border dispute, one discerns a consistent accent put by the Chinese on the security and possession of the Aksai Chin area. Indeed, that insistence runs like a central thread all along.

In 1960, Chou En-lai came all the way to New Delhi to offer a barter deal to Nehru, offering to recognize the McMahon Line if India agreed to cede to China the Aksai Chin area. Nehru refused to look at the deal.

Later, the three-point offer of October 24 and the terms accompanying the November 21 cease-fire declaration alike were designed to achieve that same end, making concession along the McMahon Line but refusing to yield an inch in east Ladakh.

The Chinese demand in their November 21 cease-fire declaration for the restoration of the status quo as in November 1959, instead of September 1962, the date on which the Sino-Indian conflict was sparked off, underlines their determination not only to cover a larger area within their jurisdiction but also to clear the entire Aksai Chin region and its surroundings of Indian presence. For, it was after November 1959 that India established a number of posts far into eastern Ladakh interspersed amidst the Chinese posts.

Under the terms of the November 21 cease-fire, in the eastern sector, the difference between the line suggested by India and China was not too substantial. But in the western sector, the Chinese sought to retain in their undisputed possession the entire Aksai Chin area, through which the Tibet-Sinkiang highway and its network of feeder roads traversed. Indeed, to make sure that this area would remain theirs, they added several qualifications to their cease-fire. Among them was a specific prohibition to the Indians against recovering their positions prior to September 8, 1962, or restoring their 43 strongpoints in the Aksai Chin area, situated not far away from the highway.

According to Dr. B. N. Ganguli, Vice-chancellor of Delhi University, Chinese designs on the border areas in Ladakh and NEFA are based on geopolitical considerations. "The



Sinkiang and Tibet plateau, which together constituted a wedge into the Himalayas," Dr. Ganguli writes, "were considered by China to be the bulwark of communist influence in Asia. Therefore, China wanted to grab those areas in the Ladakh region which would enable them to establish roads between Sinkiang and Tibet.

"China considered three routes as life-lines of a visualized dominion consisting of Ladakh, Tibet and Sinkiang. One of these routes was from Gartok to Kotang in Sinkiang via the Lanak Pass and Aksai Chin road. The second route was to Sinkiang from Demchok via Chushul and the Karakorum Pass. Finally, there was the valley route connecting Barahoti in Uttar Pradesh with Tibet."

With the undetermined border between Soviet Turkestan and Sinkiang a fruitful source of friction and with the tension between the Soviet Union and China intensifying, the need for Peking to establish a speedy and effective line of communication with that distant province in Central Asia became all the more imperative.

It is now a well-known fact that there was much more than differences of ideological strategy between Moscow and Peking when the former censured China's aggressive tactics towards India. Actually, the Soviet Union expressed its strong disapproval of Chinese adventurist posture on the Indo-Tibetan border as far back as 1959, on the ground that such a policy was inimical to the Communist bloc's strategy in the East-West cold war, as it undermined neutralism and scared the non-aligned, uncommitted countries into the arms of the West.

But even more important for Soviet Russia was its concern to protect and secure its border in Central Asia against a truculent, expansionist China. Peking has made no secret of its intentions to rectify "unequal treaties" among which it has named the one that drew the Sinkiang boundary between Czarist Russia and China.

Since China's highway through Askai Chin was designed to strengthen China's offensive power on the Sino-Soviet frontier of Sinkiang, Soviet Russia had an identity of interest with India when the latter objected to the Chinese carving the high way through Indian territory.



In the long run, there is the nagging fear in the Russian mind of a Chinese-dominated Indian subcontinent, either through military erosion or political subversion, as one American writer has pointed out. Such a development would outflank the Soviet Union and place the whole of the Soviet Far East under a greater threat than ever before.

If the Chinese continue to develop their hostility to the Soviet Union along extreme nationalistic lines, one result might be a closer Soviet interest in Indian defence, combined with attempts to wean Pakistan away from her new contacts with China. And here the Russian and the Western minds find some unexpected common ground.

Then, again, Peking nursed in its breast the passion to put India in its place. There was too much talk in the world about rivalry between China and India for the leadership of Asia and of the "race between the Communist and democratic roads," respectively represented by China and India.

Peking wanted to demonstrate to Asian and African nations who was the leader of Asia, and where India stood. To that end, the Chinese sought an opportunity to inflict a humiliation on India. With the 1962 war, China went a long way in accomplishing her ambition to establish that South-East was her undisputed sphere of influence.

That conflict also flung a spanner into India's economic development and, in the Chinese eyes, served to discredit the democratic road to human progress and proved the supremacy of the Communist way.

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While the Chinese blitzkrieg was bulldozing across the Tibetan border into India, the bloc of African and Asian countries were getting restless and agitated over the developments. They put their heads together to devise measures to halt the conflict and persuade the two parties to start peaceful negotiations to resolve the Sino-Indian dispute.

At the initiative of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister of Ceylon, six Afro-Asian countries—Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Ghana and UAR, besides Ceylon—met at



Colombo between December 10 and 12, 1962. (Within a few hours of the invitations to the Six-Power Afro-Asian Conference going out, the Chinese announced the cease-fire.)

In a nutshell, the proposals formulated by this conference were :

(a) *Western Sector*.—The Chinese forces to withdraw 20 km. as proposed in the letters by Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru on November 21 and November 28, 1962, while the Indian forces kept to their existing military positions. Pending a final solution of the border dispute, the area vacated by the Chinese military withdrawals would be a demilitarized zone to be administered by civilian posts of both sides to be agreed upon, without prejudice to the rights of the previous presence of both India and China in that area.

(b) *Eastern Sector*.—The line of actual control in the areas recognized by both the Governments should serve as a cease-fire line to their respective positions. The remaining areas in this sector could be settled in their future discussions.

This clause was clarified by the Conference to mean that the Indian forces could, under the proposals, move right up to the south of the line of actual control, *i.e.*, the McMahon Line, except for the two areas on which there was a difference of opinion between the Governments of India and China. The Chinese forces similarly could move right up to the north of the McMahon Line except for the two areas.

The two areas referred to were Tse Jong or the Thag la area and Longju area, in which cases there was a difference of opinion between the two Governments as to the line of actual control.

(c) *Middle Sector*.—The problems be solved by peaceful means, without resorting to force.

A clarification given to India by the Conference stated that the Colombo Conference desired that the status quo in this sector should be maintained and neither side should do any thing to disturb the status quo.

The Colombo Conference also made it clear that a positive response to the proposals would not prejudice the position of either of the two Governments as regards its conception of the final alignment of the boundaries.

When, in the first week of January 1963, the Prime Minister



of Ceylon and the Foreign Minister of Indonesia visited Peking to explain the Colombo Proposals, the Chinese Government announced that it gave a "positive response" to the proposals. But it turned out later from the Chinese attitude and interpretation of the proposals that Peking was not interested in either accepting or implementing them.

Subsequently, in a letter to Mrs. Bandaranaike, Chou En-lai insisted that the stipulation in the proposals regarding the Indian troops keeping their existing military positions should be equally applicable to the entire Sino-Indian border and not to the western sector alone.

In regard to the eastern sector, the Chinese Government demanded that India should continue to refrain from re-entering the areas south of the line of actual control as on November 7, 1959, vacated by the Chinese forces, and should send there only civilian personnel carrying arms of self-defence as India had done up till then.

Similarly, China would refrain from setting up civilian check-posts in the Tse Jong (Thag la ridge) and Longju areas in the eastern sector, in the Wu-je (Barahoti) area in the middle sector and in the areas in the western sector where India once set up 43 strongpoints, only on condition that Indian troops or civilian personnel do not enter those places.

This again was contrary to the clarification given to India by the Colombo Powers. According to that clarification, India's existing military posts in the western sector (Ladakh) were all along the "line of actual control" and the demilitarized zone of 20 km. created by the Chinese military withdrawal would be administered by the civilian posts of both sides. This was a "substantive part" of the Colombo Proposals. As to the location and number of posts and their composition, "there has to be an Agreement between the Governments of India and China."

This arrangement, according to the Colombo Proposals, was to be "without prejudice to the rights of previous presence of both India and China in that area." (This area was 2,500 square miles of territory from which Indian forces were pushed back in Ladakh after China's October 20 offensive. China has refused to retire from its military positions in the West).



In contrast with Peking's equivocation, New Delhi promptly accepted the Colombo Proposals in toto.

The resulting stalemate continues to this day. The position today is that in the East the Chinese have withdrawn up to the McMahon Line ; but in the West, in Ladakh, they still occupy militarily 15,000 square miles of Indian territory.

Subsequently, on March 1, 1963, the Chinese Government announced that 26 checkpoints were being set up at various places along the Sino-Indian boundary. According to a statement made by Nehru in Parliament, seven of these so-called civilian posts were set up unilaterally in the demilitarized zone in the western sector in violation of the Colombo Proposals which laid down that there should be civil posts of both sides in this demilitarized zone.

In the demilitarized zone in the eastern sector, in which there were to be 16 civilian posts, according to the Chinese unilateral declaration, there were as many as 52 combined military and civil posts and even the pretence of the posts being civilian in character has been given up. There was, apart from these posts, considerable patrolling and probing activity along the borders, particularly in the eastern sector.

Indeed, since the unilateral cease-fire, the Chinese had augmented their forces in Tibet and along the border. The strength of the Chinese forces along our border was now larger than what it was at the time of the unprovoked massive attacks in October 1962. A further development had been the forward movement of these troops to camps and strong points nearer the Indian border than they were in October 1962. In addition, considerable activity by way of construction of barracks, gun emplacements, storage dumps and airfields near the Indian border, had also been noticed on the Tibetan side.



## X

### MAO SHOOTS DOWN A CAREER

MAO'S RUDE INTERVENTION in India's destinies in the autumn of 1962 shot down a meteoric career.

Had it not been for that signal event, Lt.-Gen. B. M. ("Bijji") Kaul would have gone very far—possibly, farther even than the post of Chief of the Army Staff, and carved a niche for himself in the country's history as a great soldier-politician, if not a soldier-statesman. Indeed, Welles Hangen\* counted Kaul among those likely to succeed Nehru.

Until that sudden jerk and fall in October 1962, Kaul's progress up the ladder of success was dazzling, jet-propelled, almost dizzy. There was no knowing, but for Mao, where that tide in the affairs of Kaul would have swept him on to.

It is a sobering thought that the kaleidoscope of human ambitions can be put out of its pattern by the slightest shake. And who knows, Mao has thereby eliminated from the Indian political scene a possible Ayub of India—at any rate, Kaul, and many others, believed that he had the stuff in him, and, of course, he had the ambition as well as other essential qualifications—an extraordinary drive and energy, intense patriotism, a bumptious self-assurance, a vainglorious egoism and political sense, besides right contacts in the country's public life and a growing following among the younger officers in the Army.

Lt.-Gen. "Bijji" Kaul was a general among politicians, and a politician among generals. That was his unique advantage—and, ultimately, that also proved his undoing, for while the generals were jealous and disdainful of his extra-curricular activities in the Capital's political lobbies, the politicians distrusted an ambitious military leader hobnobbing with the mighty. As long as he was at the top, everything went fine. His circle of admirers swelled, and so did his following within the Army ranks.

Brought up in the British Army tradition of avoiding politics like the plague, senior armed forces officers felt jarred and embarrassed by Kaul's political manoeuvres. And later,

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\* Welles Hangen, *After Nehru who?*



when he began to wield undue influence in the affairs of the Army H.Q. over the heads of his seniors, their embarrassment gave place to resentment. They vaguely felt that such conduct was a breach of the military code—and that, at any rate, put them at an unfair disadvantage *vis-à-vis* Kaul.

But, from the beginning, Kaul was different from them and took pains to underline that difference. Unlike his fellow-officers who were the prototypes of their British forerunners and counterparts, Kaul did not drink, did not smoke, was not interested in gaiety and westernized social life and cocktail and dance parties. His flamboyant, melodramatic, frisky personality compelled attention. And it was not in vain that he spent a couple of years in Public Relations during the Burma War, in 1942-43. He got on extremely well with the Press; he was good, friendly and confiding, and provided “copy.”

Rommel believed that a successful leader of men should cultivate a legend about his personality. So did Montgomery. Kaul also fostered a legend woven around his dynamic energy, adventurous spirit, fearless courage and austere living. Welles Hangen described Kaul as a man “hurrying to keep an appointment with destiny.” Being something of an exhibitionist, he quite often flaunted his influence with the Prime Minister and Defence Minister, in the faces of his brother officers, to the latter’s extreme irritation. He made it known to them that the Prime Minister consulted him on important matters of state—which was indeed marked against him!

During his hey-day, Kaul had thus trodden on many a senior officer’s corns and thus made enemies all around in the armed services, so that when in 1962 he slipped and fell, they all swooped down on him like vultures.

Kaul’s other disqualification, in the eyes of his fellow-officers, was that he was a great “bull-shitter” (in army parlance one who talked tall and bragged too much).

That Kaul was a confidant of the Prime Minister who had since Independence entrusted him with important missions—Kaul was sent to Srinagar to supervise Sheikh Abdullah’s arrest—placed him in a unique position both in the political and military circles. And in no time, many careerists and opportunists in both spheres flocked to him.



Kaul relished it all. Visitors of all kinds queued up at his residence and office, and he took the trouble to meet and listen to each one of them. They brought to him their personal problems, career grievances and even political tangles for solution or to be carried to Nehru's ears. He strove hard to satisfy them all, and won their friendship and allegiance.

Kaul had the advantage of being perhaps the only one among the Indian Army senior officers who was well-versed in, and had an aptitude for, politics—nay, nursed political ambitions. For all his modern mind, Kaul believed in astrology, and a soothsayer had forecast that one day he would become the ruler of India !

That apart, as an organizer and executive, Kaul was brilliant, a "go-getter" who could hack through a thick, tropical jungle of red-tape and get things done. He became famous as the officer who performed the miracle of constructing houses for the troops at Ambala in record time on the "do-it-yourself" basis—and put the men of the famous 4th Infantry Division, "The Fighting Fourth," on the task—which was another point held against Kaul by orthodox Army Officers.

They even attributed the subsequent poor performance of that Division in NEFA to the misuse of its personnel as building labour, having been taken off for a considerable period of time from operational duties !

When he went to Korea as Chief of Staff to Gen. K. S. Thimayya, Chairman of the United Nations Neutral Repatriation Commission, Kaul hit the headlines in a big way and became a controversial figure. The Indian contingent in Korea soon became divided into pro-Chinese and pro-American Groups, and Kaul headed the former and Gen. Thimayya, said to be friendly to the Americans, headed the latter.

It was apparent that Kaul got on famously with the Chinese, who invited him to tour their country as a State guest, and he went round China and was received warmly everywhere. He was also accused of reporting to the Prime Minister on Gen. Thimayya's allegedly pro-American activities, and on that account courted much unpopularity in Army circles. An easy-going, gentlemanly soldier, "Timmy" was the idol of the officer-ranks of the Indian Army, and they took a dim



view of one who had "bitched" against him. Indeed, had it not been for the intense personal interest taken in him by Nehru and Krishna Menon, the Army hierarchy would not have allowed Kaul to go beyond the rank of Major-General.

It was against the wish of Gen. Thimayya, then COAS, and on the insistence of Krishna Menon, Defence Minister, that Kaul was promoted to Lieutenant-General, and then appointed QMG, at the Army Headquarters. According to Lt.-Gen. L. P. Sen,\* then CGS, Kaul was not selected by the Selection Board for the post of QMG. "But Menon would not look beyond Kaul, and Thimayya was forced to accept him, but only after a very serious showdown. Gentleman that he was, Thimayya denied it when Kaul asked for the reason for his putting in his resignation."

As QMG, however, Kaul was an outstanding success and saw through a crash programme of building roads along the northern borders—though the programme was overtaken by the Chinese attack in 1962.

All these great assets however primarily fell in the sphere of Quarter-Master duties, and as QMG at the Army HQ, Kaul did a grand job.

Not to have combat experience in actual war is however no disqualification. Many of the great names of World War II were no more than minor staff officers at its outbreak. Throughout World War II, General Kalwant Singh's activities were confined to the North-West Frontier, keeping guard against the Pathan tribals' warlike proclivities. Yet, Kalwant Singh proved an outstanding soldier as Corps Commander during the Kashmir fighting in 1947-48.

But what his fellow-officers held against Kaul was that he not only did not have combat experience during the last World War or the subsequent fighting that independent India had to do in Kashmir, but that he was, throughout that formative period of his career during the World War, a Service Corps Officer, and the nearest to fighting that he went was to command a Motor Transport Battalion in the Arakan!

Thus Kaul suffered from the handicap that his fellow-officers never accepted him as a combat soldier with any

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\* In the article "Who Was to blame?" by "Our Military Observer", (believed to be Lt-Gen. L. P. Sen) in *The Hindustan Standard* Calcutta.



operational experience. His first experience of commanding troops in battle was in NEFA in 1962, and that as Corps Commander.

Kaul himself in his book *The Untold Story* betrays a strange self-consciousness of the fact that he had had no opportunity to command a battalion. In that book he expatiated on how by a strange quirk of fate, he failed to get back to an infantry unit, however much he might try, until some time in 1949 when he was posted to command an infantry brigade in the Punjab, and later commanded the 4th Infantry Division at Ambala.

When Kaul was appointed cgs, in March 1961, he became particularly alive to the magnitude and urgency of the problem of building up the defences on the northern border. He plunged into his duties with his characteristic energy. He toured the forward areas in Ladakh and elsewhere in order personally to size up the situation and assess the defence requirements. During the 16 months he held the post, Kaul told me, he addressed eight letters to the Defence Minister emphasizing the urgency of supplying the Army with the right equipment for fighting in the bleak, high-altitude region of the northern border.

In one letter in August 1961, which he wrote to Menon, Kaul said, "IF the equipment is not obtained quickly, the country will be defeated." Menon objected to this sentence and wanted Kaul to amend it. Kaul refused, and insisted on keeping the sentence in.

Kaul has been blamed for recklessly launching the "forward policy"—of planting our posts at the farthest possible points along the frontier—in the autumn of 1961, which precipitated the Chinese attack later in autumn when we were not prepared for it.

According to Welles Hangen, Kaul outmanoeuvred Menon by going directly to Nehru to permit the Army to establish advance checkpoints to outflank Chinese posts set up on Indian territory. Menon's long-standing orders that Indian patrols should not engage the Chinese in any circumstances were revoked, and the Indian Troops were instructed to hold to their posts and open fire if the Chinese tried to push them out of any position on Indian territory.



His detractors charged Kaul with pursuing a provocative policy without being able to back it with military preparedness. Thimayya, then the COAS, is reported to have opposed Kaul's implementation plan for the "forward policy" as he considered it a logistical nightmare.

Kaul however explains\* how the "forward policy" came to be decided upon at a meeting in Nehru's office which was attended by Krishna Menon, Thapar and Kaul.

Looking at the various recent Chinese incursions on the military map, Nehru observed that whoever succeeded in establishing even a symbolic post, would establish a claim to that territory, as possession was nine-tenths of law. If the Chinese could set up posts, why couldn't we?

"He (Nehru) was told that owing to numerical and logistical difficulties, we could not keep up in this race with the Chinese. If we inducted more posts in retaliation, we would be unable to maintain them logistically. Also, China with her superior military resources could operationally make the position of our small posts untenable. . . .

"A discussion then followed, the upshot of which I understood to be that (since China was unlikely to wage war with India), there was no reason why we should not play a game of chess and a battle of wits with them, so far as the question of establishing posts was concerned. If they advanced in one place, we should advance in another.

"In other words, keep up with them, as far as possible, and maintain a few of our symbolic posts—where we could—in what we were convinced was our territory. This defensive step on our part at best might irritate the Chinese but no more. This was how, I think, this new policy on our borders was evolved (which was referred to by some as 'forward' Policy)."

There is reason to believe however that until October 5, when bullets began to whizz around his ears, Kaul himself did not think the Chinese really meant business. In *The Untold Story* he admits that until his 4 Corps was formed, "there was a general doubt in most minds at various headquarters whether a battle between the Chinese and ourselves

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\* *The Untold Story*.



would come so soon. Therefore there was little sense of urgency apparent amongst most of us. Instead of walking up well ahead, we began to stir belatedly, only after the Chinese intruded in the Thagla-Dhola area. Events then moved too fast for us."

Thus, by the end of the year, India had established over 50 such posts in Ladakh and NEFA. Kaul is of the view that Nehru was forced by pressure from the opposition and public opinion to embark upon this hazardous policy, on the assumption that there was really not much hazard involved.

Only the blindly prejudiced however will heap upon Kaul the entire blame for the NEFA reverses—that guilt has to be shared by several parties in varying degrees—except that Kaul as Corps Commander found himself holding the baby when things actually went wrong.

If it is true that Kaul was responsible for precipitating the Chinese onslaught in October 1962 by the prosecution of a "forward policy" that had no "teeth" in it, some of the blame directed at Kaul may stick. But available evidence also indicates that the decision on "forward policy" was taken at a high level by the Prime Minister himself, though, possibly, initiated by Kaul.

It is plausible however that Kaul, as CGS, did not object vigorously enough to the policy and the hazards involved in it in the then state of unpreparedness of the Indian Army, as he too believed that the Chinese "would only bark, but never bite."

Yet another charge against Kaul was that whereas the Prime Minister's directive on the "forward policy" made it clear that they should operate from logistically firm bases and not go indiscriminately forward, the CGS, Kaul, ordered the troops to go wildly forward, without considerations of logistics.

On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence to prove that after he was appointed the CGS, he became fully alive to the country's military unpreparedness to face an attack on the northern border. His eight letters addressed to the Defence Minister, and one even to the Defence Committee of the Cabinet, drawing attention to the urgency of the problem was only one proof of it. During his tenure as CGS, the Army was expanded by about one-fifth.



He was plunged into the NEFA fighting as Corps Commander, with too many handicaps. The Corps itself was put together almost overnight, bringing in its train all kinds of shortages and inadequacies.

But then whose fault was it? General Chaudhuri contends that as CGS, Kaul was responsible for planning the NEFA fighting, and if he subsequently did not get a properly appointed corps, the blame comes back to his own door.

Why did he not point out to the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister that a Corps could not be formed in four days? This rash undertaking, again, stemmed from his vain-glorious stance that he could do the impossible—apart from his conviction (which was blown sky-high the moment he took over as Corps Commander) that there would not be much real fighting in NEFA.

Chaudhuri also said that Kaul's orders were not clear. He was of the view that the withdrawal from Tse la, and indeed, the entire plan of fighting at Tse la, was defective.

Hardly had Kaul gained his feet as Corps Commander than he fell seriously ill—it is callous and unfair to allege that he had developed “cold feet” and was malingering.

It was indeed a worse crime on the part of the Government and the Army HQ to have let a physically ailing Kaul to rush back to resume active command of the Corps in a grave crisis solely in order to enable him to rehabilitate his “face” at the cost of the country's security interests. When things were going wrong all around, we had at the helm, at the Corps headquarters, an embittered man, mentally disturbed and physically unfit—still unrecovered from a grave ailment.

Lt.-Gen. Sen, then GOC-in-C, Eastern Command writes\* that he remonstrated with COAS Thapar against Kaul coming back to the Corps Command and pleaded that he would prefer to carry on with Harbaksh Singh, then officiating as Corps Commander. Thapar replied that Kaul had to come back to the Corps Command because “higher authorities wanted him to be rehabilitated.”

Kaul lacked, at that moment, that mental poise and tranquillity essential for clear thinking and cool decision-making.

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\* In his article in *The Hindustan Standard* of Calcutta under the byline “Military Observer.”



It was tragic indeed that at the same time the chain of command was disrupted by Kaul's practice of ignoring his immediate superior, the Army Commander, and directly communicating with New Delhi, with the COAs, the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister—which turned the Army Commander Lt.-Gen. L. P. Sen sullen and resentful. The latter was now all for letting the Corps Commander stew in his own juice.

But would a different leadership at the Corps level have made any difference to the course and outcome of the NEFA battle?

There is no doubt that a General with greater tactical experience in actual war, and one enjoying the full confidence of the officers and men at the front, does make a difference. A purposeful and resolute direction makes withdrawal orderly and disciplined.

What skilful leadership can do to troops in retreat is illustrated by Rommel's command of the German and Italian troops, outnumbered and out-equipped, retreating westwards under pressure from Montgomery after Alamein, in the North African fighting in World War II. The morale of the worn-out Italian troops under him was as bad as, if not worse than, that of the retreating Indian troops in NEFA in October 1962. But Rommel personally led and directed the withdrawal so skilfully and brilliantly, that his troops in retreat had their tails up. His own losses in men and equipment were kept to the minimum, while he managed to inflict casualties on the enemy even while on the retreat.

It might have been too much to ask for a Rommel in the NEFA fighting in 1962. But a purposeful skilled personal leadership by the Corps Commander might not only have prevented the retreat from turning into a rout, but possibly even saved Tse la and Bomdi la—for it is now known that if our troops in Tse la had not lost their nerve and had stood up and fought back, there was a very good chance of their being able to avert the disaster that overtook them.

In war withdrawal is as much part of the game as advance. It is only when retreat turns into a costly rout that public opinion wants to know how and why.

It is axiomatic that the aggressor has always the initial advantage, for he is able to choose the time and place of



attack and achieve surprise on the adversary. It is inevitable, therefore, that the aggressor will initially get away with successes. However, if the defender, inexorably pushed back by the aggressor at the initial stage, is able to keep his head, he can exploit the advantage of fighting the enemy on his "home ground." "Defence in depth" would then be his tactics, as he momentarily trades space for time.

Of course, the main blunder of the Indian Army was to have decided to give battle to the enemy at Tse La, a wrong point from many points of view, including the possibility of outflanking movements by the enemy.

Many military experts agree with Lt.-Gen. S. P. P. Thorat that in the Kameng Sector Bomdi la was the natural and advantageous point to make a stand at. If the Corps had not split its available forces between Tse la and Bomdi la, but concentrated them at Bomdi la, the outcome would have been definitely different.



## XI

### THE GREAT ILLUSION

WE HAD, at the time, a Prime Minister who was a towering personality, whose word was law to his people and who had earned the status of an international statesman.

Jawaharlal Nehru had convinced himself and his country that in the post-War nuclear era, with the United Nations keeping law and order in the world, war was not only outmoded but had ceased to be an instrument of policy, and that personal diplomacy was the new instrument.

Nehru's idealistic mind at once conjured up the congenial picture of a world where war had been banished and the rule of law prevailed, where might was no more right—a somewhat rash and premature assumption—where a nation's worth was no more reckoned by the arms and armies it commanded.

In such a utopia of romantic idealism, the Prime Minister decided that India, with its traditions of non-violence and spiritual values, would come into its own and would have a decisive and leading role to play in international affairs. And he strove hard to fit his country for that grand and noble role.

Some time in 1956, at an informal discussion on the country's foreign policy with Indian editors, Nehru, in an expansive mood, confided that it was a significant sign of the post-War times that India, without economic power and divisions to back her word, could play such an influential role in international affairs. This would have been impossible in the pre-nuclear, pre-War era.

The Prime Minister then mused : Had it not been for the East-West tussle and cold war between the two power blocs, where would India be ?

These sentiments underlined Nehru's firm conviction that the old order had changed for good, yielding place to new, where war had been outlawed and the game of international politics was played according to the Queensberry rules. They also exuded Nehru's self-assurance as a participant in that new game.

And Nehru with his unique background and international



reputation, was just the man to lead the war-weary world to the "Promised Land." The international community of the early 'fifties unanimously accepted him as a mature statesman and undisputed leader of the fast-growing and influential Afro-Asian bloc that was beginning to make its impress on the UN.

Nehru, besides, was the outstanding leader and Prime Minister of the first Afro-Asian country to shake off the Western imperialist yoke. He spearheaded the campaign for the liberation of other colonial countries. Nehru enjoyed a unique prestige all around. He was the main inspiration behind the Bandung Conference of 1955, and it was he who introduced his friend Chou En-lai to Afro-Asian leaders at that conference. Indeed, Nehru bestrode the international stage with a rare aplomb.

In a world cowering under the shadow of the threat of nuclear "co-destruction," Nehru introduced the magic *mantra* of "peaceful co-existence" and fashioned a new design for international living. Encouraged by the warm reception he received for his new philosophy from the newly emerged nations of the world, and even from among the older and maturer countries of the West, Nehru went all out, almost recklessly, to build on this earthy earth the ideal world of his imagination.

Thus we find Nehru in the mid-fifties travelling to Peking and Moscow, to the US, and the UN, preaching the gospel of "peaceful co-existence." The other dimension of this policy was non-alignment which he successfully sold to the newly-emerged, uncommitted nations as the true deterrent to the threatening conflict between two warring blocs into which the world was sought to be divided.

Nehru spiritedly denied that he was thereby forming a "third bloc," as the very concept of non-alignment was anti-bloc. He even refused the appellation of the "third force," and preferred to call it a "third area of peace," designed to be a precious bridge that supplied the vital line of communication between the West and the East, standing in between in order to avert a head-on clash between the two blocs.

With the signing of the Panchsheel Agreement with China in 1954, Nehru believed that he had achieved the consum-



mation of his glorious dream of a world settled down to peaceful co-existence. With its emphasis on ideological tolerance and non-interference in each other's internal affairs and recourse to peaceful methods to resolve international differences and disputes, the Pact was at once the corner-stone of India's relations with China and the sheet anchor of Nehru's foreign policy.

Carried away by his own crusading zeal and romanticism, Nehru however, failed to realize that in the nuclear age major wars might have been rendered impossible, but minor border and regional wars would continue to erupt, fought with conventional weapons and armies.

Thus Nehru laid great store by the Panchsheel Pact signed between the two Asian giants. China and India, two neighbours with common borders and differing ideologies, had decided to co-exist peacefully. Here was an opportunity to demonstrate in practice his splendred design for international living. And he was determined to make it succeed, whatever the cost.

Through intensive personal diplomacy—underwritten by a personal friendship with the Chinese Premier, Chou En-lai—Nehru sought to cement the friendly relations between India and China, initiated by the 1954 Treaty. These two greatest Asian powers would shape the destiny of East Asia.

And, to his mind, the best guarantee against strife and conflict in this part of the world was to maintain friendly relations between these two Asian giants.

In doing so, he ignored the well-known axiom of international diplomacy that nations have no permanent friends, but only permanent interests.

Way back in 1954, the very year the historic Panchsheel Pact was signed, Nehru, in an off-the-record chat with Indian correspondents accompanying him on his Chinese trip, revealed the thoughts passing through his mind.

The chat took place across the breakfast table. The venue was Peking, and the occasion his weekly informal meeting with the correspondents in his party.\* He liked, from time to time, to exchange with them notes and impressions on the trip.

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\* This writer was among them.



During a stimulating discussion, the Prime Minister observed that some day or other these two Asian giants were bound to tread on each other's corns and come into conflict, and that would be a calamity for Asia. That was an eventuality we should all strive hard to avert.

That was what, it would appear, Nehru was trying to do all through, until October 1962. Incidentally, that statement, apart from revealing the working of Nehru's mind, also indicated Nehru's acute awareness of the Chinese threat to India even as early as 1954.

And, of course, this policy of non-alignment-cum-peaceful-co-existence admirably suited India, which enabled her to devote all her attention and resources, undistracted by dire defence needs, to the gigantic task of economic development, of which she had a staggering backlog to fill.

To that noble end Nehru laboured hard, sacrificed much—leaned over backwards to accommodate Chinese whims, overlooked Chinese trespasses into Indian territory and even concealed them for a while from his own people or sought to explain them away—indeed, staked his very political career in stubborn defence of his noble “brain-child” (which the Opposition in Parliament described as having been “born in sin”)—until he was, one bleak autumn morning, rudely awakened to find, alas, too late, that he was not dealing with an honest friend, but with a cunning, unscrupulous, cynical foe.

Nehru seemed to betray an emotional attachment towards a sister country like China, which had struggled, like India, long and valiantly against Western imperialism. The “crush” for China could be traced back to the thirties and early forties. During the war, he fraternised with Marshal Chiang Kai-shek, when he visited New Delhi, and on independence, hastened to appoint an Indian Ambassador in Peking.

This passion for China, if anything, intensified following the Communist take-over. Thus at a press conference in New Delhi in March 1959, Nehru dubbed as “grossly exaggerated” press reports of the goings-on in Tibet that culminated in the Dalai Lama's flight to India. He described the bloody events in Lhasa as “more a clash of wills at present than a clash of arms or physical bodies.”\*

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\* Nehru's speech in Parliament on March 17, 1959.



Thus from 1954 to 1956, while Nehru was busy expatiating on the "2,000 years of Sino-Indian friendship," Chinese frontier units were busy conducting what Peking later called "military investigations" and surveying more than ten routes for the proposed Aksai Chin highway to connect Sinkiang and Tibet.

Several of the alternative routes blueprinted were even deeper in Indian territory than the one finally chosen. Of all this activity on our own territory, our Government remained inexplicably ignorant. New Delhi was unaware of the existence of the Aksai Chin road until the Chinese Government announced in September 1957 that the road would open to traffic the following month. Even thereafter, the Government of India did nothing about it until the following summer.

When India sent two reconnaissance parties to the Aksai Chin area to check up on the construction of the new road, and one of them was seized by the Chinese, Nehru could not bring himself to remonstrate to Peking until October 18, 1958.

Nehru's note protesting against the construction of the road and inquiring helplessly about the missing Indian reconnaissance party, pathetically stated: "As the Chinese Government are aware, the Government of India are anxious to settle these petty frontier disputes so that the friendly relations between the two countries may not suffer."

In their reply on November 1 the Chinese insisted that the Aksai Chin highway passed through Chinese territory, and not Indian.

Nehru later admitted to have been "worried" about the developments, but failed to take into confidence either Parliament or the public until 1959. His excuse was: "No particular occasion arose to bring the matter to the House because we thought we might make progress by correspondence and when the time was ripe for it, we would inform Parliament."

Nehru conceded, "It was possibly an error or a mistake on my part not to have brought the facts before the House." Still, as late as the autumn of 1959, he sought to minimize the whole border question and dismissed the Aksai Chin plateau as a wasteland "where not even a blade of grass grows."

Peking had made no secret of its claim that the Chinese troops had started patrolling the Ladakh region in July 1951.



Yet, Nehru would not even refer to the subject in his frequent friendly exchanges with Chou En-lai. He later frankly confessed in Parliament: "I saw no reason to discuss the frontier with the Chinese Government because, foolishly if you like, I thought there was nothing to discuss."

In the November of that year, under constant pressure from the Opposition, Nehru made this astonishing statement in the Lok Sabha: "But I can tell the House that at no time since our independence have our defence forces been in better condition and finer fettle and backed by greater industrial production than today. I am not boasting about them, but I am quite confident that our defence forces are well capable of looking after our security."

Was the Defence Minister drawing the wool over Nehru's eyes? Or was it an effort on the part of the Prime Minister to fob off a screaming Opposition?

In December 1961, Nehru assured Parliament that during the previous two years the situation had "broadly changed" in our favour, "not as much as we want it, but it is a fact that in areas which they (have) occupied, progressively the situation has been changing from the military point of view and other points of view in our favour." The allusion here is to the multiplication of Indian check-posts in Ladakh. It was a deceptive statement.

Nehru deftly floated from the premiss that "there *should* be no war" to the conviction "there *could* be no war" and presented a blind eye to the inconvenient and unpleasant realities that knocked down his rosy thesis.

Thus Nehru's unbounded confidence in his own philosophy and diplomatic skill, his faith in human goodness and in his personal friendship with the Chinese leaders in Peking, combined to foster the universal conviction in this country that such a dear, trusted friend like China—a 2,000 year-old friend—would never go to war with India.

This conviction permeated the entire Indian landscape, fatally infecting the military leadership in New Delhi, and kept India and her armed forces woefully unprepared both psychologically and physically.

For example, in September 1959, following the Chinese intrusion in the Aksai Chin area in Ladakh, Nehru enjoined



upon our civil and military officers and others to "avoid actual conflict unless it is practically forced upon us. That is to say, we must avoid armed conflict not only in a big way, but even in a small way. On no account should our forces fire unless they are actually fired at."

Nehru then added, "I think it is unlikely that the Chinese will take up any aggressive line on this frontier (NEFA), that is, try to enter into our territory any further."

Similarly, in Ladakh too, he envisaged no more than a harmless game of filling vacuums, in which the two parties played hide-and-seek with each other by planting posts wherever they found empty, unoccupied space.

On November 8, 1962, moving a resolution on the Chinese aggression in the Lok Sabha, Nehru confessed: "Even the Chinese aggression on our border during the last five years, bad as it was, and indicative of an expansionist tendency, though it troubled us greatly, hardly led us to the conclusion that the Chinese would indulge in a massive invasion of India."

The official mood was to believe that there would be no show-down but only "positional warfare" and "minor skirmishes" at the most, even though Intelligence reports spoke of Chinese troops massed on the NEFA border and of intense military activity on the other side of the line.

It was thus that the Chinese encroachments on Indian territory in Ladakh as early as 1957 failed to alarm our Government. Even the new belligerence of tone in Peking's diplomatic exchanges with New Delhi after 1959, with the Dalai Lama obtaining asylum in India, could not shake our Government out of its complacency and the world of make-believe in which it lived.

As late as October 1962, when the die had already been cast, the Prime Minister clung to the view that the Chinese really did not mean a regular war. Gen. Kaul in his *The Untold Story* under the date October 2, records: "On the same day, General Thapar saw the Prime Minister along with Lt.-Gen. Sen. He (Prime Minister) pointed out that this was the first time we were going to use force against the Chinese, though for good reasons (as against walking into a vacuum without opposition, a practice followed by us till then) and that this was bound to have serious repercussions. *Nehru said he had*



*good reasons to believe that the Chinese would not take any strong action against us*" (italics Kaul's).

Later in the month, when the Chinese actually invaded India, Nehru, speaking in the Lok Sabha on October 25, however described the military assault as a "severe shock", and made this remarkable confession: "We were getting out of touch with reality in the modern world and we were living in an artificial atmosphere of our own creation."

Two days later, as though testifying to Nehru's confession, the Peking *People's Daily* spat venom at the Indian Prime Minister, and thereby betrayed the worst species of cynical *realpolitik*.

This official organ of the Chinese Government wrote: "The goal pursued by this ambitious Nehru is the establishment of a great empire unprecedented in India's history. The sphere of influence of this great empire would include a series of countries from the Middle East to South-East Asia, and far surpasses that of the colonial system set up in Asia in the past by the British Empire."

Indeed, after 1961, only the wilfully blind could have failed to see what the Chinese were up to on the Indo-Tibetan border.

This myopia in New Delhi has to be entirely attributed to the foreign policy pursued by the Government and to its sole architect who, astonishingly enough, almost to the end, hugged his romantic illusion in the face of a shattering reality.

The tragedy was that Nehru, the man of peace, in his element in the pursuit of policies of international amity and goodwill, found himself a woeful misfit in the new role of a war leader he was called upon to play now, under pressures generated by Chinese belligerence. He intensely disliked war and persuaded himself that the war threat from China was a false threat.

He abhorred and shunned that new role, but his high sense of duty and the legend of indispensability of his leadership to the country kept him at his post.

On December 5, 1961, replying to the China debate in the Lok Sabha, Nehru made this revealing statement: "My whole soul reacts against the idea of war anywhere. That is the training I have received throughout my life, and I cannot get rid of it at the age of 72."



This picture of Nehru during the years preceding the 1962 China crisis would however be incomplete and thus would do him injustice unless we presented the other side of the medal. For, there is also plenty of evidence of his acute awareness of the Chinese threat to India, of the intermittent efforts he made to take protective measures, short of war, along the Indo-Tibetan border, of his periodical directives to the Defence Ministry and the concerned State Governments to maintain active vigil and establish check-posts at disputed points along the border so as to prevent a *fait accompli* by the Chinese.

Indeed, the Prime Minister ever since 1954 had been impressing on the Defence Organization about the imperative necessity of physically holding the entire frontier of north-eastern India, by moving up outposts, bringing it under administrative control and paving the way for the emotional integration of the local people.

It is quite possible that if the Army HQ and the Ministry of Defence had acted upon the Prime Minister's instructions issued and desires expressed from 1954 onwards, the situation in Ladakh might well have been different.

In the NEFA border, in particular, Nehru had been prodding the Army HQ to establish border posts at all the key points along the McMahon Line, so as to assure the Government of India's presence in the disputed border region.

On one occasion, the Prime Minister upbraided the Army authorities for being shy to send a reconnaissance party to an area which was already within our territory, even according to the most extravagant Chinese claim. He considered it unsatisfactory that we should not even know the extent of Chinese encroachment into our territory.

Giving his approval to sending a patrol party in the Ladakh sector, the Prime Minister however stressed that the Indian patrol should not have any skirmish or armed conflict with any Chinese party. He also insisted on early action.

Nehru held that we must not be reluctant to send reconnaissance parties to areas which are legitimately within our territory, even though the Chinese might claim it.

He was greatly exercised by a Chinese threat in NEFA and concentrated on consolidating the grip on that remote frontier region. And he believed that this frontier had been fairly well



secured. For, on August 22, 1962, he told the Rajya Sabha: "Our judgement of the situation (1949-50) was that the danger lay in the NEFA part and from then on we tried to protect the NEFA border. Gradually, we have built up outposts there and, more important, administration has gradually spread in NEFA . . . . The one border which we protected more or less adequately was the NEFA border."

Where obviously Nehru went wrong was in putting such implicit faith in personal diplomacy and human relations and mentally rejecting war as an instrument of policy. His overconfidence in his own statesmanly genius, diplomatic skill and personal charm to resolve international tangles was his undoing.

For he was convinced that he had a distinctive role to play in international affairs and in shaping their course; that by background, aptitude and intellectual attainments, he was best qualified for that role.

Even from days before Independence, foreign affairs was Nehru's favourite preoccupation. He made the Indian National Congress internationally conscious. After Independence, as Prime Minister of the country, he retained to himself the portfolio of External Affairs, and revelled in that role. Indeed, international affairs was Nehru's obsession as well as forte.

He had staked his all on a foreign policy which he was convinced was not only right but foolproof. Thus, when the Chinese launched the military assault on India in 1962, they not only stabbed India and Nehru in the back, but knocked the bottom out of a foreign policy with which Nehru had personally identified himself. That was the "stroke" really from which Nehru never recovered.



## XII

### A DYNAMIC MINISTER

V. K. KRISHNA MENON breezed into the Defence Ministry in 1957 like a fresh breath of air, which blew away the cobwebs and layers of dust accumulated on the portfolio over the years.

This was the Cinderella Ministry of the Government of India which, until then, had stagnated and withered under neglect over the preceding seven or eight years. During that period, mostly third-rate men, some of them senile, held that important portfolio—which was the measure of the importance the Government attached to it.

The Defence Ministry and the Armed Services had been considered superfluous and redundant to a Gandhian, peacefully co-existing nation. Government as well as Parliament grudged funds to them. Officers already in the Armed Forces were frustrated and disgruntled, and the Services failed to attract the best among the country's youth, whereas before Independence this was a much coveted profession.

Krishna Menon's dynamic leadership immediately put the Defence Services on the map. Once again, after a long time, the Defence Ministry began to hit the headlines. Wielding a long-handled broom, Menon cleaned up and activated the entire place, and made the Service Chiefs and their staff feel that they were orphans no more. Here was a boss who was prepared to fight for them and protect their interests, and they rejoiced at his advent and rallied round him. They were prepared to do anything for him.

Menon looked into the pay-scales, allowances and working and living conditions of the officers and other ranks of the three Services. He enhanced their pensions, restored their ration allowance, which had been abolished; raised officers' salary scales which, till then, compared poorly with those of police officers; and stepped up their retirement stage from major to lieutenant-colonel. He took measures to provide them with housing and introduced welfare programmes. The scope of death gratuities and family pensions was extended.

Actually, Menon claimed that he was responsible, in all, for 72 concessions to the Armed Forces in the field of their



emoluments, welfare and living conditions.

Menon told me that in 1959 he had proposed a doubling of the officer strength in the Army, but Gen. Thimayya and Gen. Kumaramangalam (then Adjutant-General) opposed his proposals on the ground that after the emergency had passed they would not know what to do with so many officers! Finance Minister Morarji Desai also opposed the proposal.

Menon also said that Gen. Thimayya was against the manufacture of automatic weapons because, he said, they had enough guns to last 47 years.

Menon then concentrated on indigenous production of defence requirements with a view to building up the country's self-sufficiency and reducing its dependence on foreign countries in a vital sphere like defence.

He sought to use the existing ordnance factories to their full capacity and expanded some. These factories now turned out artillery, heavy mortars, naval guns and barrels, recoil systems for guns, mountings, carriage and buffers for heavy and medium calibre guns, small arms, bombs, shells and various other types of ammunition, naval mines, high explosives, depth charges, parachutes and mountain warfare equipment.

On his initiative, aircraft factories were set up in Bangalore and Kanpur, trucks and heavy vehicles were built at Jabalpur and a factory for constructing tanks was started at Avadi, in the South. Explosives were manufactured at Bhandara, guided missiles at Bangalore, marine engines at Bombay and Calcutta, automatic weapons and alloy steels, and dehydrated foods at Mussoorie.

He initiated plans for the manufacture of semi-automatic rifles, 7.62 mm. ammunition, 120 mm. Brandt mortars and Brandt mortar ammunition. These were all expected to go into production by the end of 1962 and early 1963—just about the time of the Chinese offensive or a little later.

Mountains of stores and equipment had lain idle in open military depots and pens. He embarked upon a campaign of recovery and reconstruction. Thousands of condemned vehicles were reconditioned and put into service. The existing maintenance depots were activated and new ones added.\*

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\* T. J. S. George, *Krishna Menon*.



Menon also brought about closer co-ordination between the Ministry and the three Services and between the Services themselves. A Research and Development Committee sought to mobilize scientific and technical skill, while more civilian scientists were recruited to work for the Armed Forces. In 1958, all the research establishments were merged into a new Defence Research and Development Organization.

Wartime maintenance depots were now turned into full-fledged production factories which produced anything from armament and aeroplanes to milk evaporators and pressure cookers.

Replying to public criticism, in an interview with me in 1965, Menon averred that not more than six coffee percolators had been produced in defence factories "in all those years." He added, "Hair-clippers were produced because the Army needed them to cut hair. Pressure cookers were essential in order to sustain our troops manning pickets at high altitudes on the northern border."

Menon doubled the strength of the Cadet Corps to 2,63,469 in the first four years of his tenure at the Defence Ministry. In addition, he instituted the Auxiliary Cadet Corps to train youth in team spirit and discipline combined with patriotism.

A National Defence College, on the model of Britain's Imperial Staff College, was set up in the Capital for the training of senior officers of the three Services. At this institution, these officers collaborated with each other in the study of the higher direction and strategy of war as well as of military, scientific, industrial, social, economic and political factors involved in war. A college of military engineering and another for military medicine were also established in Poona.

Menon pointed out to me that by 1961-62 the military budget of the country had reached Rs. 300 crores. At the outset, the defence production output was Rs. 14 crores, but it had ultimately reached Rs. 100 crores, when Menon resigned from the Defence Ministry in 1962.

The sound foundations that Menon laid for India's defence self-sufficiency during his regime was acknowledged later in 1965 during the Indo-Pakistani conflict, when indigenously produced defence equipment stood in good stead.

But the fact remains that when the Chinese launched a



military assault on India's northern border, our Army was found utterly unprepared. As Defence Minister at that critical moment and during the preceding five years, Krishna Menon owes an explanation to the country. It was not as though Peking had not given ample notice of their evil intentions towards India. From 1959 onwards, Chinese belligerence was mounting up, until it burst out in a crescendo in October 1962.

The truth is that Krishna Menon pursued at the Defence Ministry policies that faithfully and blindly conformed to the accepted thesis of the Government of India as formulated by the Prime Minister, namely that there was no immediate threat to India's external security—that China would never attack India, and that Pakistan dared not attack India, or if it did, our Army was strong and equipped enough to frustrate Pakistan's designs.

In following that line, Krishna Menon found little difficulty. He was a life-long pacifist himself and a great admirer of Bertrand Russell. Notwithstanding his verbal aggressiveness and lethal tongue, Menon was as much a misfit as Nehru in the role of a war leader.

It is one thing to carry out zealously and efficiently constructive, long-term military projects calculated to bring self-sufficiency to the country's defence forces. It is quite another, as Defence Minister, to lead one's country into war. He was just not cut for such a role. Menon's mental make-up, his lifetime's philosophy and upbringing, his entire being revolted against it, and could not be overnight moulded to new and radically different ends. But if wars were fought with lethal tongues—and pens—many a country that has incurred Menon's displeasure would have by now lain destroyed and devastated! A delegate at the UN once described Menon as the "arrogant apostle of peace."

For many years, at the United Nations and elsewhere, Menon had passionately advocated disarmament and denounced war hell, book and candle. What is more, his mind, like Nehru's had been for long sold on the concept that in this nuclear age war was outmoded and suicidal to humanity.

Speaking on one occasion in a disarmament debate at the



UN, Menon declared: "There have always been wars since there have been people. . . .But we have at last come to the time when civilized humanity does not regard them as inevitable. . . .Either man will abolish war or war will abolish man."

Such being Menon's own conviction, he neglected the immediate defence needs of the country and concentrated his energies on defence production with a rare gusto, which could fully mature and bear fruit some years hence.

Thus he proved completely impervious to the crying needs of the immediate task facing the Army, of defending our border on the bleak Himalayan heights—one very, very different from any the Indian Army had undertaken in the past, calling for a different kind of training and equipment. Indeed, they had a foretaste of it in the skirmishes they had had with the Pakistani troops in the Zoji la sector in the Kashmir War in 1948.

At the time of Partition in 1947 there was plenty of equipment. By 1962 however the equipment had badly deteriorated. The Government's attention had been repeatedly drawn to the position, but no steps were taken to remedy it, even though subsequently fresh units had been raised. By 1962 the reserves of ammunition had gone alarmingly low and vehicles were in a bad state.

By June 1962, the deficiency in rifles alone amounted to 60,000. The armour was in such disrepair that two full tank regiments in Western Command alone were ineffective. The radar was of World War II vintage and outmoded. There were hardly three months' reserves of ammunition for the 25-pounder artillery. The engineering equipment was obsolete. The Signals equipment needed modernizing.

The 17 Division fighting against the Portuguese in Goa suffered acute shortages in elementary equipment such as shoes. Luckily, the Goa operation concluded in less than a week. Indigenous production had affected the quality as well as quantum of the equipment available to the Services. In NEFA, for example, to meet one unit's needs, another unit had to be kept short.

Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul in his *The Untold Story* states: "Menon, I think, was largely responsible for putting Nehru in the frame of mind by which he looked sceptically towards our



repeated representations to grant sufficient funds for modernizing the Army and making up its various shortages.”

Thus the Defence Minister laid himself open to the charge of grave negligence of duty in failing to attune the Indian Army to the kind of warfare called for at high altitudes and mountainous terrain, against an enemy adept at it and numerically superior. Menon had at least three years' notice of the impending Chinese aggression. Nor can a Defence Minister be forgiven for taking chances with the country's defence security.

Between the two schools of thought prevailing in the country at the time, Menon headed the one which played up the threat from Pakistan and underplayed the Chinese menace to India. Apart from his ideological bias in favour of Communist China, Menon had for long adopted Pakistan as his pet enemy, having for so many years monopolized the footlights in the glamorous role of a valiant gladiator over the emotionally-combustible Kashmir question. Indeed, that role had paid him good dividends at the elections too.

As Defence Minister, Menon was expected to be better informed and more alive to the critical situation fast developing on our northern frontier. Intelligence reports pouring into the Army Headquarters and his Ministry gave adequate warning as well as a good idea of the dimensions of the threat the Chinese were posing on the Tibetan border. But these reports did not fit in with the Government's thesis, and therefore Menon paid no credence to them.

Indeed, many considered it a grave error of judgement, if not an act of irresponsibility, on the part of the Defence Minister to have left his post of duty and flown to the UN on a different mission at a moment when the situation on the NEFA border was coming to the boil.

His biographer T.J.S. George however avers that Krishna Menon, particularly after 1959, was all for energetic action against the Chinese menace on our border, that he strove hard to persuade the Government to provide him with funds to build up our defences on the Tibetan border, but the Cabinet, and the Finance Minister in particular, frustrated his effort, and that the Cabinet insisted upon diplomatic action against China in preference to military measures.



George writes :

“Krishna Menon in 1957, after the Aksai Chin affair, impressed upon the Cabinet the need to build up border defence more speedily. The Cabinet however felt that India should contain the threat diplomatically . . . As a result of this kind of thinking in the Cabinet, Menon ran into obstructions all along the line. At the execution stage, all his plans got bogged down.

“The first full-scale assessment of the need for preparedness on the northern borders was made in October 1959. But the Finance Ministry insisted on phasing out the programme put up by the Defence Ministry. The overall financial effect assessed by the Defence Ministry was 868 million rupees, with a foreign exchange component of 137 million rupees.

“Finance refused to increase the foreign exchange allocation for Defence, and said that the demands should be covered only to the extent that foreign exchange was available from the periodical allocations made to the Defence Ministry. As a result of this decision, Defence could cover demands only to the value of Rs. 410 million by March 1962; only Rs. 4.5 million worth of foreign exchange had been made available as against the 137 million required.”

Discussing this subject with me, Krishna Menon referred with exasperation to the time-consuming and fatiguing processes laid down by the Finance Ministry which inordinately delayed sanction of funds. He also spoke of Finance Minister Morarji Desai's personal antagonism towards him, which led to frequent friction and argument.

Morarji Desai, however, denied to me that there were any occasions of personal arguments between him and Menon, and said that most of the discussions took place between Menon and the Financial Adviser in the Defence Ministry, who represented the Finance Ministry and had to approve of any fresh expenditure by the Defence Ministry.

That there was not much love lost between Menon and many of his Cabinet colleagues was an open secret in New Delhi. Apart from Morarji, Menon also named Pandit Gobind Vallabh Pant as another Minister who always opposed him at Cabinet meetings. Menon said Pant considered him a communist and took into his head to oppose everything Menon proposed !



Nor can one, in discussing the constant friction between the Defence Minister and the Finance Ministry, fail to take into account Menon's ideas of "man-management" which always amounted to "man-handling", psychologically speaking.

Nevertheless, impartial eye-witnesses to these scenes aver that most of the arguments and difficulties arose from the Defence Minister's additional and large demands on the limited foreign exchange available for distribution.

Inevitably, the Finance Minister, the custodian of that precious commodity, would want to go thoroughly into the demand and often appear niggardly and unimaginative in processing the demand. But when Menon was involved in the transaction, an additional dose of an entirely avoidable acerbity would be introduced into the episode.

A "Military Observer,"\* evidently an eye-witness to these unseemly wrangles, in an article in *The Hindustan Standard* of Calcutta, discussing General Kaul's book *The Untold Story*, explains how they came about. "Menon's constant sarcastic and disparaging remarks about the Finance Minister and the Finance Ministry at conferences held in Menon's room, with Service Chiefs, psos of the Armed Services and Civil Servants, left no doubt in any one's mind that he had no time for either of them. In fact, many an important conference ended in an uproar, with heated words exchanged between the Financial Adviser and the Defence Minister, whenever the Financial Adviser stated that he would have to obtain the orders of his Minister before agreeing to a particular proposal under discussion."

The "Military Observer" adds, "This was by no means an act of obstruction by the FA (Financial Adviser), as the finances involved were invariably in excess of the foreign exchange allotment made to the Armed Services in the budget."

Another obstacle pointed out by Menon's biographer is :

"The Director-General of Supplies and Disposals, the agency that had to provide clothing, could seldom execute the indents in time, because it was tied down to Government's policy of supporting small-scale industries. It was obligatory for the

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\* Believed to be Lt.-Gen. L. P. Sen, who was GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, during the 1962 operations in NEFA, and was earlier CGS at the Army HQ at New Delhi.



DGSD to arrange supplies through small units, and this unnecessarily meant delay."

A third example cited is: The Defence Research Wing perfected a prototype of the automatic rifle as early as 1959. The project got stuck in the Army HQ, and the prototype was not tested and passed until March 1962.

In corroboration, it was pointed out that in 1962, Nehru testified in Parliament that the Defence Minister had been insisting from 1958-59 on the purchase of up-to-date weapons from various sources including Western countries, "but various difficulties arose and points of view differed."

Indeed, Menon's biographer claims that Menon had differed from his Prime Minister's China policy in the very first years of freedom. Illustrating his point George states :

"Nehru had been advised by the Indian Ambassador to Peking (Sardar K. M. Panniker) that there was no possibility of any clash of interest between India and China, and the policy towards Peking had been formulated on this assumption. Menon questioned the assumption then, but had no evidence to put forward in support of his suspicions. He identified himself with the policy and tried to establish genuine friendship between New Delhi and Peking.

"After Aksai Chin however Menon's early instincts came again to the fore, though he still found it difficult to carry the rest of the Cabinet with him. Fighting his way through temperamental, ideological and financial obstructions, he launched a crash programme of road-building, mountain-warfare training and armaments manufacture. It was for the first time in history that India was turning its attention to building up defences in the inhospitable Himalayas. But again, it was a late start. Menon's programme turned out to be not fast enough, for the Chinese forestalled him and moved in too massively and too soon."

But all that Menon's biographer has to say in his defence only underlines the fact that Menon—to say the least—committed a gross error of judgement in failing to realize the imminence of the Chinese threat.

If he had realized the urgency of the situation, he would have concentrated on getting arms and equipment for the Army immediately and from any source whatever, including



imports. Indeed, he would or should have "raised hell" in the Cabinet—of which he was quite capable—to bring home to the Government as a whole the urgency of the situation. It is difficult to believe that Menon failed to assess the gravity and urgency of the situation, what with Menon's keen intelligence and armed as he was with a comprehensive military picture and Intelligence reports, available to him at the Defence Ministry.

The only other possibility is that, knowingly, Menon preferred to take the opportunistic line of least resistance and to fall in with the Prime Minister's thinking, as against speaking out the unpleasant truth and risking disagreement with, and displeasure of, Nehru.

If it is the latter, then Menon's offence is even graver. For then he would be convicted of knowingly concealing truth and ignoring an impending danger to the country's security, in the slender hope that that danger might not come true !

In a statement from Tezpur on January 10, 1962 Menon declared: "The India-China border dispute was not of such magnitude as could precipitate a war."

Indeed, as late as April 20, 1962, Menon said in a speech in Madras that he would not be a party to any step "which will expose our troops to unnecessary jeopardy . . . . China cannot swallow us up any more than we can swallow up China . . . . No monopolist newspaper is going to jockey us into a position where we have to defend ourselves from a position of weakness."

If he found that any of his Cabinet colleagues obstructed him in his attempts to build up the defence of the country, was it not his duty to make an issue of it in the Cabinet and bring home to the Government the gravity of the situation ?

These would appear to be Krishna Menon's acts of omission. But his acts of commission at the Defence Ministry were possibly graver.



## XIII

### SERVICE CHIEFS' NIGHTMARE

ONCE HE settled down in the Defence Minister's chair, Krishna Menon however decided that he knew all about the defence of the country and that he could indeed teach a thing or two to the Service Chiefs—and, what is even more questionable, began to play politics in the Defence Ministry and introduced cliques within the precincts of the Army Headquarters.

He played junior officers against their seniors and encouraged the former to contact him directly over the heads of their superiors; he rebuffed Service Chiefs and contemptuously rejected their expert opinion. He thus wounded their *amour propre* and played havoc with discipline among the officer cadre of the Armed Forces.

"To make matters worse, Menon then adopted the habit of bypassing the Chief and sending for or telephoning Staff officers direct," wrote the "Military Observer" in the article in *The Hindustan Standard* of Calcutta. "This was neither appreciated by the Staff Officers nor by Thimayya, the then COAS. But to maintain peace it was agreed that the Staff Officer would supply the information but would immediately inform the Chief the gist of the information supplied."

This article complained that Menon treated the three Service Chiefs as "glorified office boys, completely undermining their authority and forcing them to accept his decision whether they were right or wrong".

Menon would call constant conferences to discuss subjects which were either never discussed or left half finished, continued the "Military Observer". Menon would make "caustic remarks either about an individual or the Service in general in order to avoid having to make a decision. Often it was a subject that did not interest him, and he would waste time talking of other matters and then declare that he had an important meeting and close the conference. The natural outcome for the Chief and his PSOs was frustration and, in cases, resentment. They had spent hours drawing up briefs and explaining the subject."



Menon then tried to build a coterie of his own men at the Army HQ, by getting around him his favourites as also those who would eat out of his hands. Thus he brought Kaul to the Army Headquarters in the teeth of opposition from the Army Chief and his psos. Of this episode, the "Military Observer" writes:

"Then came the appointment of Quarter-Master General. Kaul was not selected by the Selection Board. Thimayya was warned by his Army Commanders and psos not to recommend Kaul as QMG. The main danger was that as QMG he would be a member of the Selection Boards and would split the loyalties of the Officer Corps even further. Menon, however, would not look beyond Kaul, and Thimayya was forced to accept him, but only after a serious showdown. Gentleman that he was, Thimayya denied it when Kaul asked him the reason for his putting in his resignation. This was the final detonation of the tension between Thimayya and Menon that had been stockpiling over a period."

Menon's feud with Thimayya—the best soldier India has produced—became an open scandal, until it exploded with the latter tendering the resignation of his post. The Prime Minister got Thimayya to withdraw the resignation. Menon treated the other Service Chiefs equally obnoxiously.

Commenting to me upon the Thimayya resignation episode, Menon said that the story was leaked out to *The Statesman* correspondent at a Polish Embassy party in New Delhi by "Gen. Thimayya or some friend of his after he had withdrawn his resignation." He also alleged that Ashok Mehta drafted Thimayya's resignation letter.

Menon further denied all responsibility for the controversial promotions and appointments, including that of Kaul. Menon maintained that all those appointments were approved and signed by the Chief of the Army Staff, though it is a well-known fact that Menon browbeat the Service Chiefs into having his own way with appointments as well as other matters.

At a production conference in 1961, Menon is reported to have remarked: "Seventy-five per cent of the difficulties come from the Chiefs of Staff. I am not saying they have not made up their minds. For, they have not got any minds to make up!"



Now, for Menon such a witticism would be screamingly funny; but the victims of such gratuitous insult at an open conference, would hardly consider it so.

Then, again, Menon would send for one or the other of the Service Chiefs at odd hours, sometimes even in the night, for "consultations," and then keep him waiting inordinately long. When, at last, ushered into his presence, Menon would plead that he had forgotten why he had sent for the Service Chief or would discuss with him some unimportant matter which could have easily waited till the next day.

When I asked Menon to comment upon these allegations, his cryptic reply was: "Why ask me?"

At this stage, Krishna Menon metamorphosed from the most popular to the most detested Defence Minister among the Services.

Menon soon developed an allergy for all outstanding Indian Army officers with any minds of their own. Thus he heartily disliked General Thimayya, Lt.-Gen. Thorat, Gen. Chaudhuri, Lt.-Gen. Sen, Lt.-Gen. Manekshaw and Lt.-Gen. Verma, all men of impressive service record.

Indeed, he instituted investigations against Thimayya and Thorat for some alleged remarks by them. Against Verma he set up a regular committee of inquiry, which however exonerated him. A similar committee was also constituted to go into some charges against Manekshaw. The latter was also exonerated by the committee but Menon did not reinstate him and withheld his promotion.

Menon even hinted that Thimayya was likely to carry out a *coup d'etat*, and it was believed that civilian officers were detailed to keep a watch over the COAS under the Defence Minister's instructions. It had been proposed that Thimayya should be made India's first five-star general; but Krishna Menon denied that honour to him.

Menon had developed such a prejudice against most of the top brass in the Armed Forces that he did not have a single good word to say about them. He called Thorat an "uppish" man and, obviously, for that reason, denied him his due by refusing to make him the Chief of the Army Staff after Thimayya. In his eyes, a certain senior general was "lazy," another "thoroughly incompetent," a third "corrupt", a fourth



“fond of women,” and so on.

Menon summed up to me his dark despair while Defence Minister in these words: “The Army officers’ morals were low, and they were no good. The IAF were hopeless and dropped all supplies in ravines and wrong places. The Government would not give me enough foreign exchange. Everyone was against spending on defence. This was Gandhi’s country. Under the circumstances, we could only play a game of chess with our potential enemy.”

Even General Thapar, whom he appointed Chief of the Army Staff in preference to Thorat, was held in contempt by Menon. Thapar, he told me in 1964, did not even know the names of places in NEFA ! After the NEFA debacle, Menon disclaimed responsibility for Thapar’s appointment as COAS and alleged, “Thapar with his pull in the Army got himself appointed to the senior post of GOC-in-C, Western Command, and Thorat was sent to the Eastern Command.”

On the eve of the 1961 budget, Krishna Menon invited senior journalists to an off-the-record conference at the Defence Ministry to brief the press on defence problems. At this conference, in an exchange with me, Menon maintained that Thapar had a “better service record” than Thorat. When I challenged him on that point, Menon semi-jocularly retorted: “Oh, one Maharashtrian pushing forward the claims of another Maharashtrian!”

In particular, Krishna Menon is charged with putting, at the most critical moment in the country’s history, in the two key positions at the Army HQ, two men who were, to say the least, not the best available generals in the country—at that moment, the best available generals were cooling their heels far away from the scene of battle or were about to be sent out into retirement—Gen. Thorat was already out, while Gen. Chaudhuri was on the way out.

It was apparent that Gen. Thapar’s greatest qualification for the post of the Chief of the Army Staff was his malleability—unlike Thorat whom Menon considered “uppity.” Menon hoped that a man with such an unspectacular service record would be beholden to him for being made the Army Chief and eat out of his hands.

Menon was, of course, later disappointed, as Thapar re-



fused to be his rubber-stamp and there were a couple of occasions when he stood up to the cantankerous Defence Minister.

At the Naval Head-quarters, Menon had preferred the quieter Rear-Admiral B.S.S. Soman as against Ajitendu Chakraverty, the seniormost and better qualified naval officer. At the head of the Air Force, he had the equally malleable Air Vice-Marshal Engineer.

Menon chose Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul for the other key post of Chief of the General Staff in the Army not so much for his outstanding soldierly qualities as for the special reason that he had the ear of the Prime Minister.

For Menon, who had few friends in this country and had only Nehru as his sole political life-belt, was concerned about reinforcing his lines of communication with the Prime Minister's House. It was a well-known fact that Kaul enjoyed a special position of confidence with Nehru.

Menon also sniffed political aptitude as well as leftist ideology in Kaul, which Menon welcomed, apart from his sneaking admiration for Kaul's drive and organising ability. Kaul's record in Korea had impressed Menon. Kaul as Chief of Staff to the UN Repatriation Commission, had endeared himself to the Communist Chinese, as against Gen. Thimayya, Chairman of the Commission, who was a favourite of the Americans. Menon was grooming Kaul, with the full blessings of Nehru, to succeed Thapar.

Menon who is not known to suffer either fools or wise men gladly, was extra indulgent to Kaul, even took it sportingly when Kaul hit back when Menon was rude to him—no other officer in the Armed Forces had been so brutally frank to Menon or told him where he got off. Menon frequently consulted Kaul on all sorts of matters, including those on which Kaul could hardly be taken as an expert.

Thus when the country was face to face with catastrophe in NEFA, many a Lieutenant-General of established reputation was ignored and Kaul was moved out of a vital post and given the command of a special corps formed to "throw the Chinese out". In a crisis like this, when the best hands were needed on deck, a good soldier like Lt.-Gen. S. H. F. J. Manekshaw found himself on the shelf.

Early in 1962, after his thumping electoral triumph against



Acharya Kripalani, Krishna Menon returned to New Delhi, like a refreshed giant, with his head buzzing with new ideas and ambitions. He concluded that his victory at the hustings was a clear indication of the country and the Congress going Left.

With Nehru showing signs of aging fast, staring before Menon was the oft-put question in the country: "After Nehru, Who—and What?" Menon wanted to make sure that after Nehru, the Congress would remain left-oriented. To that end Menon, K. D. Malaviya, the late Dr. A. V. Baliga and other comrades bent their energies to mobilise and consolidate leftist forces within the Congress and the country.

For his new ambitious plans, Krishna Menon thought his hand-picked set-up at the Army HQ, with his favourite Kaul in the key position, would prove an asset in an emergency. After Nehru, one never knew what would happen: It was good to keep a grip on the Army, just in case !

Now, Kaul was neither leftist nor rightist but a patriot and nationalist, with his own political ambitions kindled by events in neighbouring Pakistan and Burma leading to a take-over by military rule.

The thought also constantly occurred to him: What will happen after Nehru? Would the country be plunged into anarchy? In such an eventuality, what would be his and the Army's role and duty? As to the latter, he had no doubt in his mind. He had always felt that what his country needed was a period of "strong Government" and of late he was getting increasingly convinced, as he watched the economic drift, inefficiency and corruption in which his country was wallowing, that democracy was an inefficacious panacea for the fell ailments it was suffering from.

Kaul felt that in the uncertain times immediately ahead, it was good politics to keep on the right side of a dynamic political leader like Krishna Menon who could come in handy in any eventuality. In any case, Krishna Menon's favour and patronage were essential to attain his immediate ambition of getting into the chair of COAS.

With the mild, gentlemanly Thapar now holding that position, Kaul was already the de facto boss of the Indian Army, and he had also built up around him a growing group of



hero-worshipping young Army officers who were prepared to follow him anywhere. Not taking any chances, Kaul was getting prepared for the part.

Kaul's relations with Krishna Menon could possibly be put in the category of "love-hate," though Menon was uniformly indulgent to Kaul, even as a fond parent would be to a favourite, albeit wayward, child. As recently as 1965, Menon spoke highly of Kaul even though, he said, many had reported to him that Kaul was speaking disparagingly of him. Indeed, Menon refused to believe the reports and remarked, "He must have generally blamed politicians."

On the other hand, Kaul freely talked of Menon's weaknesses to others and had defied his Defence Minister's orders and wishes with impunity. The most blatant instance of such defiance was Kaul's taking a ride in a Soviet helicopter, against Menon's orders, and getting the Soviet aircraft condemned, when Menon had already placed an order for them in preference to American ones. Menon was furious, but ultimately defended Kaul's action in Parliament, when assailed by the Opposition.

Kaul discussed India's defence problems with the American Ambassador over the head of his Defence Minister. According to Welles Hangen,\* at meetings with American diplomats and generals, Kaul bitterly complained against Menon and asked the Americans to do everything possible to maintain Western links with the Indian Army.

Hangen also credits Kaul with persuading Nehru, in October 1962, to request for American and Western arms on an emergency basis "despite Menon's last-ditch objections."

Indeed, Kaul took on himself a lot and got away with it. Kaul submitted a tentative list of Indian military needs to Galbraith, US Ambassador in New Delhi, even before Nehru had taken a decision to turn to the West in India's hour of peril.

He took upon himself to report to the Defence Minister against brother-officers' alleged misconduct. For example, he was accused of denouncing to Krishna Menon Lt.-Gen. Manekshaw for allegedly impugning constituted authority. The Defence Minister instituted a three-man inquiry board which however dismissed the charges against Manekshaw.

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\* Welles Hangen, *After Nehru Who?*



Menon once took Kaul to task for discussing with the Prime Minister directly problems of defence, over the Defence Minister's head. Kaul retorted : If Menon did not like it, he was free to complain to the Prime Minister himself about it, as it was the Prime Minister who discussed those matters with him.

When Chester Bowles came to India as President Kennedy's Special Representative in 1961 and asked to meet Kaul, Krishna Menon again frowned at it but did not prevent the meeting, as it was initiated by Bowles.

Discussing the 1961 reverses in NEFA with me, Krishna Menon referred to his own "defence in depth" plan of fighting the attacking Chinese. His plan consisted of withdrawing steadily and according to plan to Bomdi la and then trapping the Chinese there and mounting an all-out offensive. But, he said, the Prime Minister and the country were utterly demoralized, and in the circumstances retreat or withdrawal had become impossible. "We could have challenged the Chinese because the Chinese were asking for trouble, as they came down into the plains," Menon said. "But the Old Man Nehru was getting perturbed, and the country's morale was going to pieces. We had no Churchill. I don't want to say anything more because it would amount to blaming Nehru."

Asked about the Thorat Plan—a blue-print which Lt.-Gen. S. P. P. Thorat had prepared in October 1959, when he was GOG-in-c., Eastern Command—Menon declared he had never heard of any such thing !

The Thorat plan, after a close study of the situation, had drawn up a military appreciation and laid down a "defence line" and expected the Indian troops to retreat half-way down NEFA and then give battle to the enemy at Bomdi la and not Tse la. Based on this concept, later, in March 1960, the Eastern Command carried out an exercise, Lal Killa, lasting six days, which conceived of both China and Pakistan as attackers in collusion in the Eastern zone.

As a result of this exercise, Thorat also assessed the defence requirements in terms of men, equipment, vehicles and animals.

But the Thorat Plan, a thorough and latest military appreciation of the defence problem in NEFA, was lying untouched



and accumulating dust on the shelves, while ill-digested improvisations were being hatched at the Army HQ by men who were neither familiar with the terrain and fighting conditions in NEFA nor had studied its peculiar defence requirements in the context of the enemy concentrations and preparations on the other side of the frontier.

In the Air Force, it was bad enough that the country should be importing some twenty different types of aircraft bought from five different countries, which made standardization impossible and maintenance uneconomic, and involved different kinds of technical training to meet different types of aircraft.

Menon added to the IAF's headaches by misemploying highly trained airforce engineers and technicians on fancy projects such as the production of AVRO turbo-jet transport planes, on a British licence.

Thus, by monkeying with the delicate organism of military discipline and morale, Krishna Menon became responsible for a general demoralization in the officer ranks from top to bottom. This state of affairs inevitably affected the morale of commanders and other ranks in the fighting line, and was directly responsible for the poor performance of Indian troops in NEFA against the Chinese.

At a moment when the Chinese threat was menacingly rearing its head on the country's northern frontier, all that Menon seemed to be concerned about was building up a clique of his own at the Army HQ, when he should have put the country's security uppermost in his mind and got the most competent soldiers the country could provide to fill the key-posts. He could not even plead in defence that the Chinese did not give him notice of their intentions.

Consequently, his enemies freely alleged that Menon was entrenching himself in the defence set-up of the country in preparation for a military coup.



## XIV

### A "CAN'T-DO-IT" ARMY HQ

IN KEEPING WITH the general atmosphere in New Delhi at the time, the Army Headquarters' record from 1954 onwards was a sorry tale compounded of lethargy and complacency.

Far from functioning as the watch-dog of the country's external security and producing a solution for every defence difficulty, the Army authorities in New Delhi readily found a difficulty for every solution proposed for the defence and protection of our northern border.

They trotted out facile excuses why the Prime Minister's directives about setting up check-posts and manning defences on the Tibetan border could not be implemented—inaccessibility, logistical difficulties and even strategic worthlessness of the sites suggested were the alibis.

Following the Chinese "liberation" of Tibet in August 1950, there was a spurt of intense activity at the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence.

In October 1950, the Historical Division of the External Affairs Ministry prepared a paper underlining the implications of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, which dealt mainly with the NEFA frontier and said little about Ladakh.

On November 12, 1950, the Army HQ examined the defence of the North-Eastern Frontier and appointed a committee to examine the possibility of Chinese Communist troops occupying points in the disputed border areas of India and the feasibility of advancing our posts of the Assam Rifles in the border to forestall their ingress.

Almost simultaneously, an interdepartmental committee (Defence, External Affairs and Home Ministries) recommended that a scheme of setting up 21 check-posts along the Indo-Tibetan border in NEFA should be implemented as a matter of great urgency.

But hardly any action was taken on these recommendations, with hopes still entertained that the Sino-Tibetan problem might be solved by peaceful negotiations.

In December 1950, the Prime Minister announced from the floor of the Lok Sabha that the McMahon Line would not be allowed to be violated.



Thereupon, the Governor of Assam impressed upon the GOC-in-C., Eastern Command, that measures should be taken in hand to implement the Prime Minister's announcement. He stated that Nehru's announcement, had created a new factor and that the gateways into India must be manned immediately. The Governor suggested that the outposts should be advanced up to the McMahon Line itself, so that the frontier was assured by Indian presence there.

Later, a conference in Shillong, attended by the Chief Secretary, the Inspector-General of Police, the Adviser to the Government and other high-ranking civil and military officials, however, came to the conclusion that no useful purpose would be served by advancing the outposts upto the McMahon Line itself, as the "results achieved would be totally incommensurate with the efforts employed."

On December 1, 1950, the Government of India appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of Maj.-Gen. Himmat-sinhji, to survey the whole field of defence of the North and North-Eastern Border starting from Ladakh in the North to the Indo-Burma border on the north-east and to make recommendations.

This Committee recommended in 1951 that the Government should study the Frontier question and decide which line, in the areas where it was indefinite or disputed, it would claim, if only as a basis of negotiations. The Committee added that once we had decided on the line, we should take steps to hold it effectively and prevent unilateral occupation by Chinese or Tibetan troops or officials. This applied particularly to the disputed areas where armed police might have to be stationed, added the report.

The Committee stressed that the "strategical importance of Ladakh is more real today with the consolidation of Sinkiang and the liberation of Tibet by China," and warned that the numerous passes along the entire border from Ladakh to Uttar Pradesh rendered the "whole area vulnerable to infiltration and incursion."

The report further underlined that the fact that most of these passes were snow-bound during winter "should in no way guarantee their impassability, for a determined enemy would overcome to a considerable degree the barriers of nature."



With the excitement over the Chinese occupation of Tibet subsiding, however the issue of securing the Indo-Tibetan border gradually sank into the background. With the advent of the Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai phase, the border problem was completely forgotten—at any rate, by the public and the press in general.

All that was done by way of paying heed to the Committee's apprehensions and recommendations was that the Union Home Ministry set up three civilian check-posts in 1951 in Panamik/Shyok, Chushul and Demchok, in Ladakh, and in late 1953, following an incident, the State Government strengthened their check-post at Nilang in Tehri Garhwal, on the UP-Tibet border.

The next spurt of intense activity in New Delhi over the China problem came in 1954, following the signing of the Sino-Indian Agreement in May of that year.

In July 1954, the Prime Minister addressed a memorandum to the Secretary-General, Ministry of External Affairs, the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

In this memorandum Nehru described the Agreement as a new starting-point of our relations with China and Tibet, and affirmed that both as flowing from our policy and as a consequence of our Agreement with China, the northern frontier should be considered a firm and definite one, which was not open to discussion with anybody. The Prime Minister directed that a system of check-posts should be spread along this entire frontier more especially in such places as might be considered disputed areas.

This important declaration by the Prime Minister however failed to be followed up with a co-ordinated plan of action by way of implementation.

On October 29, 1954, the Government of India withdrew the Indian garrisons in Tibet, thus symbolizing the withdrawal of India's interest in Tibet and its affairs. These garrisons were stationed in Yatung and Gyantse by the British Imperial Government of India and had been there for half a century.

To the Tibetan Government, this Indian garrison had served as an evidence of New Delhi's active interest in Tibet's autonomy and external security.



In September 1954, at a conference of representatives of the Ministries of External Affairs, Defence and Home, seven places were affirmed as disputed points. The Defence Ministry was called upon to take over the manning of those outposts, as it was considered that neither the Home Ministry nor the State Governments concerned could do justice to the task.

The Ministry of Defence however expressed its reluctance to accept the responsibility, and when pressed, promised to examine the matter further. Apparently nothing came of this "further examination" as most of those points remained unmanned when the Chinese stepped into and out of them, at will, thereafter. By 1954, the number of check-posts in Ladakh had risen from three to five.

In September 1956, following the Shipki La incident, on the Himachal-Tibetan border, the Prime Minister issued the following detailed directions to the Himachal Pradesh Government :

1. Our force should stay on as near Shipki La as possible.
2. They should however not force their way beyond their present position as this would presumably mean a conflict with the Chinese.
3. If the Chinese advance further to our side, they should be checked. Before doing so, the Chinese Force Commander should be clearly told that we consider their crossing Shipki La (pass) without our permission is improper and an aggression and they must go back.
4. We shall not permit them to go any further and if they do not go back, we would have to take further steps in the matter. Our Force Commander should add they are not taking further steps immediately because the matter has been referred to Delhi and Peking and because of our friendly relations they would avoid a clash, but if there is any further aggression, a clash is inevitable.
5. We would like you to consider sending some further troops or members of the Border Security Police immediately to this place in support of our present strength if necessary.
6. We have already protested to the Chinese Embassy once and are protesting again both here and through our Ambassador in Peking and Consul-General at Lhasa.



But, still basking in the glow of the Panchsheel Agreement, neither the Government nor the public was in a mood to be bothered about such contra-indications as a likely threat on the common Sino-Indian frontier.

The third spurt of activity in New Delhi incited by the China problem, erupted in 1958, following the revelation of the Chinese encroachment in Aksai Chin. This phase was intensified when the Dalai Lama obtained asylum in India in the April of next year.

In December 1958, with the construction by the Chinese of a highway through Aksai Chin, the Army HQ wrote to the Defence Ministry suggesting the location of an Indian check-post within easy reach of the Karakorum Pass so as to ensure an early warning of any Chinese ingress into our territory across that Pass.

Incidentally, Aksai Chin had not been visited by Indian authority until 1958, when patrols were for the first time sent out to that region.

At a meeting on January 8, 1959, in New Delhi, it was agreed to open civilian posts at Tsogtsalu, Shamal Lungpa and Shinglung in central Ladakh. It was also decided to send a civilian reconnaissance party up to Lanak la with a view to establishing a check-post on this route as near the border as possible after the completion of the reconnaissance.

On July 28, the Chinese arrested members of a civilian patrol party sent to Khurnak Fort, who were detained for 20 days before they were released at our Chushul check-post.

In August, the Chinese established a post at Spanggur, clearly within Indian territory. Thereupon, the Army HQ instructed the Western Command to expedite the establishment of the projected post at Chushul and to get the Chushul garrison to carry out active patrolling along the border to ensure that there should be no further Chinese encroachments into our territory.

The Army HQ's orders however made it clear that no offensive measures should be taken to evict the Chinese from their newly set up post at Spanggur.

The Army HQ underlined that the deployment of the Jammu and Kashmir Militia along the Indo-Tibetan border in the Ladakh area was designed to establish the de facto possession



of territory on our side of the traditional border in that area, and to prevent, by means of patrolling, infiltration into our territory by the Chinese or other unauthorised persons.

The Western Command was instructed that while carrying out these tasks if Chinese were encountered in our territory, our forces should not resort to the use of force unless it was necessary in self-defence. "On such occasions, efforts will be made to persuade them to leave our territory. If they refuse, the status quo will be maintained and the matter will be reported to this HQ for pursuing through diplomatic channels."

In October, the Army HQ suddenly woke up to find that our defences in Ladakh were inadequate and that the four posts deployed along the border were not capable of withstanding any large-scale Chinese aggressive operations. Nor was it possible, at this juncture, in view of the terrain and poor communications, to maintain a force capable of defending the border. The Army HQ therefore asked the Western Command to formulate recommendations for a general line of defence against a likely Chinese advance.

Coming as it did so late in the day, this was an alarming confession to make.

The Western Command presented their proposals prescribing the line where a Chinese advance should be held, and to that end, demanded the placing of four infantry battalions in Ladakh with a few supporting arms and services during 1960—which they described as their minimum requirements for the immediate defence of Ladakh. A fifth infantry battalion was to be inducted in 1961.

The Western Command also asked for a speedy construction of the Kargil-Leh road to take one-ton traffic, so as to minimize the dependence on air maintenance for the units of the Ladakh brigade.

That month the Prime Minister transferred to the Army the responsibility for the security of Ladakh and for any further operations which might be considered necessary along the entire Ladakh-Tibet border. From this point, the Army came into direct contact with the Tibetan Border forces and the operational and patrolling duties passed on exclusively to the Army.

The Indian Army's state of unpreparedness at this stage



was underlined by an Associated Press dispatch, datelined New Delhi, October 31, 1959, published in the *New York Times*. It reported: "The Indian Army has abandoned any hope of defending large areas of India's Himalayan frontier against Communist China," and quoted an authoritative source for the statement.

The AP correspondent in New Delhi could not have made up this dispatch, and must have got it from a responsible high-up source in the Army. "If Chinese forces based in Tibet tried next spring to take the Indian border territories they claim," stated the dispatch, "India's military strategy would be to concede large areas virtually without a fight. The Indians would be prepared to resist only at points deep in their own territory."

The dispatch added, "The Army's decision, it is reported, is based on inability to move large forces up to the frontier because of want of roads and other facilities."

The AP report spoke the brutal truth, as the position stood in October 1959. But the tragedy is that it remained the position even in October 1962, with little progress made in the Army's preparedness on the Tibetan border, during the interval.

At the close of 1959, we still find that despite clear instructions and warnings by the Prime Minister and prolonged deliberations by our officials at the highest level, the Indian line of control in Ladakh continued to be more or less where it was in 1954. On the other hand, in the meantime, the Chinese had built a network of roads to support military operations within Ladakh—the Aksai Chin highway in the northeast, the Lanak la-Kongka la road running east-west in the middle sector, and a jeep track, Sinkiang-Quizil jilga-Shinglung-Sumdo, right in the north.

In NEFA, though most of the region had been brought under administrative control, the Indian Army had not moved in yet in any appreciable measure.

On May 21, 1960, the Ministry of Defence had just decided that the Army should in the "next few months" establish itself on the Indo-Tibetan trade route running from Shyok to the Karakorum Pass via Shukpa-Kunzang-Katalik-Murgo, and on establishing these piquets, attempt should be made to patrol out eastwards.



Thus, what time the Chinese were gobbling up chunks of Indian territory and arresting our men with impunity, the concerned authorities in New Delhi were occupied in a furious verbal debate on whether and how far our patrolling parties could go so as to avoid clash with the Chinese !

On June 2, 1960, the Army HQ enunciated to the Western Command the Government of India's current policy for the defence of the Indo-Tibet border in Ladakh as "maintaining our positions firmly on our side of the international border under our control at present. So far as the 'disputed areas' are concerned, the status quo that has existed for some time is to be maintained."

The Army HQ stated, "Within the framework of the above policy it is necessary that we should exercise effective control over the areas which are undisputed/unoccupied as also prevent any further infiltration into our territory."

The Foreign Secretary, S. Dutt, had on May 29, 1960, spelt out the patrolling policy. Summing up the decision on the subject, he stated that there was no obligation on India *not* to send out forward patrols. We were however committed to avoid border clashes, and much would therefore depend upon the situation in a particular sector. If, for instance, a Chinese post was known to be just across the frontier, we should not send a patrol towards that post, since the risk of a clash between the patrols on both sides would then be substantial. On the other hand, if our post anywhere was four or five miles away from the border and we had no means of knowing what had been happening on the other side, there was no reason why our patrol should not go forward. But the patrol should be clearly instructed not to use force either from a distance or when it faced a Chinese patrol. The patrol should come back and report to the nearest post. The matter should then be referred to the higher authorities for further instructions.

It was not until August 30, however, that the Army HQ issued final instruction to the Western Command on the subject. Simultaneously, in a note addressed to the Ministry of Defence, the cgs, Lt.-Gen. L. P. Sen, cautioned that if as per the Foreign Secretary's note of May 29, patrolling was intensified and posts set up in the disputed areas, the Chinese might



react sharply. The note emphasized that in such an eventuality, "the possibility of the international border, which was dormant at the moment, becoming active again, could not be ruled out."

The cgs further explained that primarily due to logistic reasons, induction of only a limited number of troops into the Ladakh area had been possible till then. With the available troops in the area, therefore, the Army might not be in a position to counter effectively any large-scale incursion by the Chinese.

This note from the cgs, passed on to the Foreign Secretary on September 5, created quite a flutter in the dovecotes of the External Affairs Ministry. S. Dutt was provoked to remark: "It is surprising that the decisions reached in May have not yet been implemented."

Following the Foreign Secretary's comment, the Defence Minister asked for an explanation from the Army HQ. In reply, the cgs pointed at various logistical difficulties as responsible for this unpreparedness and inability on the part of the Army in Ladakh to carry out the Government's orders.

In the face of the urgency of the situation, what immediate steps were taken by the Army HQ to resolve the difficulties referred to by the cgs in his reply? No impressive evidence is available of the efforts made to break through them.

Of course, it must be conceded however that there was not much that the cgs and the Army HQ could do about it, unless the matter was treated with high priority urgency at the Cabinet level, and the Government itself had given the line-clear for cutting out the red tape and the painfully slow routine and for mobilizing resources expeditiously to carry out a paramount task.

Nevertheless, the Army HQ cannot escape the charge that it had failed to discharge its duty by not being sufficiently alive to the danger. As the watch-dog of the country's external security, the Army HQ should have, betimes, warned and prodded the Government to action.

After 1960, with danger staring in the face, and having to deliver the goods, the Army was suddenly bitten by a sense of urgency, while the Government still refused to believe that the Chinese war threat was either real or imminent. Now, it



was, thus, the Army HQ's turn to inject that sense of urgency in the Government and get it to move on with the supreme task of speeding up the country's military preparedness to contain—let alone punish—any Chinese adventurism on the northern border.

Nor was that easy to do, as both in the Government and at the Army HQ the conviction still ran strong that the Chinese did not intend a showdown with India, that they were indulging in a game of bluff and brinkmanship.

Towards the end of the year 1960, considerable Chinese activity was noticed around the Hot Springs area in Ladakh. It was suspected that the Chinese were surveying the region in order to construct a link road connecting the north-south road in Aksai Chin, further north, with the east-west road in the south starting from Lanak La and passing through Kong Ka la pass.

Any such road link had to pass through or skirt round Hot Springs, which was very much inside Indian territory. An Indian military post was located there. It was therefore decided that the post in the Hot Springs should be strengthened and that regular patrols should be sent out by this post up to the frontier claimed by the Chinese according to their 1959 map.

The Prime Minister accorded his approval for the proposal. On December 30, the Army HQ instructed the Western Command to implement the decision. But three months thereafter, the decision still remained unimplemented.

On March 22, 1961, the cgs (Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul, just appointed to the post) pleaded to the Ministry of Defence that due to the numerous demands on the airlift into Ladakh, such as, border roads, construction of airfields, air maintenance of troops already in Ladakh and the limited flying days available in the year due to bad weather, it had not been possible to induct the proposed force into Ladakh. On that account, the cgs stated, for some time the scope of the defensive arrangements in Ladakh would be restricted to two tasks: (a) prevent infiltration into the unoccupied areas of Ladakh; and (b) defend Leh.

This letter from the cgs to the Defence Ministry underlined a shocking lack of sense of urgency on the part of the Army



HQ in regard to a vital matter affecting the security and integrity of India's border and reflected a casualness of attitude towards compliance with even the Prime Minister's instructions.

On April 12, 1961, the Western Command wrote to the CGS on the subject of the general unpreparedness of the available armed forces to ensure the security of the border areas touching both Pakistan and Ladakh. Thus prodded, the CGS addressed an important letter to the Ministry of Defence.

In this letter, Kaul bluntly stated that the resources available to XV Corps were inadequate to repel any Chinese incursions into our territory and that therefore we might have to accept temporary setbacks in the forward areas in Ladakh. These setbacks might stem from, the CGS conceded, our inability to induct sufficient troops in the localities involved and to maintain them by air, absence of roads in these areas and certain other factors such as the inadequacies of certain airfields and lack of shelters available for troops, stores and equipment at high altitudes, apart from shortage of fighting troops or adequate reserves.

Kaul concluded, "As things stand today, it has to be accepted that should the Chinese wish to carry out strong incursions into our territory at selected points, we are not in a position to prevent them from doing so."

By the middle of June 1961, the Indian Army had some 15 posts set up in Ladakh, all of which were supplied by air. In a note to the COAS, on June 10, the CGS warned that unless the Air Force could drop 364 tons of construction stores and supplies in the course of the month to these outposts, some of the posts might have to be abandoned. The note also stated that it was estimated that the Air Force would be able to drop only one-third of this tonnage during June, and therefore the Army might have to give up four of the posts for the present.

All this time, there was little evidence of the Indian Army attuning itself to the Chinese way of fighting or to high-altitude warfare. Nor was any effort noticeable on the part of the Army seriously to study Chinese war tactics and techniques and to devise measures to counter them. The Army was kept, right through, Pak-oriented in strategic thinking and tactical training.



If democracy is government by discussion, we had too much of it at Defence and External Affairs Ministries over the Chinese threat on our northern border, and no commensurate action.

The stark fact is that the Army HQ failed to realize that only the brave deserve the fair, that if the Indian Army fails to measure up to the defence needs of our northern border, then it not only lays itself open to the charge of abdicating its duty but the country forfeits its right to claim that border.

There can be no "It can't be done" about the defence of one's country's frontier; it has to be done, failing which the enemy will encroach upon or invade our territory across it with impunity.

A distressing state of affairs in New Delhi at the time was that while interminable discussions took place on urgent and vital problems, even at the Defence Minister's or the Chief of the Army Staff's level, the problems concerned got lost somewhere in the files, and a collateral minor issue assumed all predominance. Often months, nay years, would pass before decisions taken at the highest level were translated into action.



## XV

### AMONG THE GUILTY

WHEN THINGS go wrong, the buck is passed furiously from one to another. In this process, the civilian intelligence agency, the CIB, on which the Army depended for information about the enemy, has received more than its share of the blame for what happened in the 1962 war with China.

There can be no doubt that there is much room for tightening up the operations and methods of the CIB to meet the specialized requirements of the Army in the field. The Defence Minister's summary of the Henderson Brooks Report comments: "The inquiry has brought out that the collection of intelligence in general was not satisfactory. The acquisition of intelligence was slow and the reporting of it vague."

The summary adds, "The second aspect of intelligence is its collection and evaluation. Admittedly, because of the vague nature of intelligence, evaluation may not have been accurate. Thus a clear picture of the Chinese build-up was not made available. No attempt was made to link up the new enemy build-up with the old deployment. Thus field formations had little guidance whether there were fresh troops or old ones moving to new locations. The third aspect is dissemination of intelligence. It has come out that much faster means must be employed to send out processed and important information to field formations, if it is to be of any use."

The Defence Minister concluded his statement in the Lok Sabha with the remark: "There is no doubt that a major overhauling of the intelligence system is required."

In the 1965 Indo-Pakistani conflict too, the CIB came in for much criticism from the Army HQ. On the other hand, the CIB complained that the Army HQ often ignored its reports and assessments and failed to act upon them until events proved those reports right.

For example, the CIB maintained that in 1965, they had reported to the Army HQ days ahead about the mass infiltrations by the Pakistanis and fully anticipated the Pakistan Army invasion in the Chhamb sector of Jammu. But the Army HQ had failed to take them seriously and act upon the intelligence supplied.



But a typical instance which underlines the need for the CIB to study the specialized requirements of the Army was the intelligence reports duly submitted to the Army HQ in 1965 about the sighting of the Pakistani Armoured Division in the Sialkot sector.

Since India was not aware of the formation of a second armoured division by the Pak Army, the Army HQ assumed that the armoured division seen in the Sialkot sector was the 1st Armoured Division, the only armoured division Pakistan possessed. It later turned out that the armoured division in the Sialkot sector was a newly formed 6th Armoured Division, while Pakistan's powerful 1st Armoured Division was concentrated in the Khem Karan sector for an ambitious blitzkrieg into India.

The failure of the CIB to identify the Pak division in the Sialkot sector was a vital omission from the Army's viewpoint and cost us a lot in the Khem Karan sector. For, if we had known that Pakistan's spearhead division was down south and not in the Sialkot sector, we would have been better prepared to face the powerful Pakistani thrust at Khem Karan.

Going back to the 1962 events and the CIB's performance, it has to be conceded that, while some of its reports lacked precision in the details, the civilian intelligence agency maintained a regular flow of vital information about the enemy activity on the other side of the line, right through, particularly after 1959. Much of its utility was however nullified by the scepticism betrayed by the Army HQ towards intelligence supplied by the agency and by their reluctance to act on it.

Between 1959 and 1962, some remarkably accurate and detailed reports of the intensified military activity of the Chinese on the Tibetan side of the border appeared in the Press, which both the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs strove hard to throw down, solely because they failed to suit their book.

It is evident that the refusal of the Directorate of Military Intelligence to pay credence to CIB reports, many of them grave and vital in content, further handicapped the Indian Army operations in NEFA later, in the autumn of 1962.



The latest trend at the Army HQ—accelerated by the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict—is to demand the transfer of the military aspect of intelligence operations from the CIB to the Directorate of Military Intelligence. Apart from the additional expense and duplication involved, one cannot help wondering whether the present set-up at the DMI consisting of amateurs and transients could ever prove more efficient and effective than the professionals manning the CIB.

Besides, at the head of the Directorate of Military Intelligence is a “bird of passage,” an Army officer who is no specialist and puts in a tour of duty for a couple of years at the post before moving out to another job. Intelligence is a highly specialized science with its own highly evolved techniques. Only specialists and professionals could do justice to its exacting and developing demands.

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Now, we come to the other factors and elements that should share the guilt for what happened in NEFA in 1962.

Next in order—to Jawaharlal Nehru, Krishna Menon and the military leaders of the period—among “The Guilty” comes the Opposition in Parliament. There is no doubt that the Opposition by its reckless tactics were largely responsible for driving the Prime Minister into a corner and forcing him to take up a rigid attitude on the China problem, which ultimately compelled him to order the Army to fight the Chinese at the wrong time and in the wrong place.

In October 1962, when the balloon went up on the NEFA border, the Nehru Government had been driven, prematurely, to a point of no-return by the Opposition, from where the only next step was to begin shooting, even before the guns were adequately loaded.

Nor can the Opposition refuse to share the guilt for keeping the country unprepared to defend itself against the Chinese aggression in 1962.

Indeed, the same Acharya J. B. Kripalani, who turned out to be the most uncompromising critic of Nehru’s China policy, sang a different tune until 1959. The staunch Gandhian that



he is, speaking on the Defence Budget in the Lok Sabha in 1957, Kripalani declared : "The mounting expenses on the Army should be cut down. The followers of Gandhi and adherents of universal peace should not increase military expenses. Otherwise, their professions would be hypocritical."

Then again, the following year, during the debate on the Defence Budget, Kripalani even went further. He said "I would submit—and this is a very delicate point to which I have to draw attention of the House and the country—we had believed that in a non-violent India, the last thing that the Government would contemplate would be an increase in the military budget. But I am sorry to say, and I think it would disturb the soul of the Father of the Nation, that in recent years there has been an increase of Rs. 13 to 14 crores in the Defence Budget. May I ask why are we increasing our military establishment? Have we any design on any country?"

Indeed, it must be conceded that Parliament as a whole generally shared Kripalani's prejudice against expenditure on defence right from 1947 onwards, and all along grudged funds for the expansion of the defence organization and modernization of its armed forces.

For quite a while, Parliament actually questioned the need for a strategic (bomber) air command for a non-violent Gandhian country, on the ground that bombers were offensive weapons which India did not need because she had no desire to go to war against any country !

Similarly, for many, many years the Government and Parliament turned a deaf ear to the Indian Navy's persistent plea in favour of such an essential acquisition as an aircraft-carrier.

The Parliament and the country had been firmly sold on the notion that it was incongruous for Gandhi's country to maintain an elaborate army, and that in the modern nuclear age, war was outmoded and had ceased to be an instrument of policy.

Thus, in the context of the larger canvas of the why and wherefore of the 1962 debacle, the acts of omission and commission of the commanding officers in the field pale into insignificance.



## XVI

### A SUMMING UP

THE TWO WARS India has fought in the last six years have revealed certain grave deficiencies in our defence set-up. They have made us increasingly conscious of the fact that our defence forces and their equipment and training are shockingly behind times. Indeed, they belong to the World War II vintage. Since then the armies of other countries have marched far ahead in their thinking, training and weaponry.

The Henderson Brooks inquiry must have partly covered this ground. But that inquiry's primary task was to carry out a post mortem into the 1962 debacle. While analysing the deficiencies from which the Indian Army suffered in the Himalayan war against the Chinese in 1962 and recommending measures to remedy them, that Committee could not have obviously gone deep enough into the overall question of modernization of the Indian Armed Forces as a whole and measuring them up to the country's defence security needs.

Indeed, even for the limited task entrusted to it, the Henderson Brooks Committee suffered from an inherent handicap, in that it was not high-powered enough to be as frank, fearless and comprehensive as the occasion demanded.

Many in the Army considered that a lieutenant-general was not high enough—in a “pips”-conscious, brass-hatted world—to do justice to the onerous task. Others thought that Henderson Brooks was not the best available officer in the Indian Army—he was considered too mild a personality to conduct the inquiry effectively enough.

The handicap under which the Henderson Brooks Committee (of which Maj.-Gen. P. S. Bhagat VC was the other member) laboured was underlined by the fact that it failed to call Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul for oral evidence before it—this was stated to have been done under orders from above. The Committee was content with a written statement from Kaul, obviously the most important witness ever for purposes of this inquiry.



Indeed, it was the duty of the Committee to question and cross-question Kaul at length, as he was the most vital source of information to find out what exactly went wrong in NEFA in October-November 1962. Kaul actually wrote to the Committee, demanding to be called by it for oral evidence. But his request was turned down.

The explanation given is that Kaul was senior to Henderson Brooks, and it would embarrass the latter and be a breach of protocol for a junior officer to put his senior in the witness-box and cross-examine him !

Such an important Committee, charged with such an onerous task should, indeed, have been headed by a retired, full-fledged general—Cariappa would have been the ideal, what with his reputation as a fine soldier, highly respected in all ranks of the Army and a man of high integrity and courage.

In view of the limitations imposed by the terms of reference and composition of the Henderson Brooks Committee, its report and recommendations could not, obviously, be as comprehensive and far-reaching as demanded by the situation.

I am of the confirmed view therefore that there is a good case for instituting a full-fledged inquiry by a high powered, broad-based Commission, to go thoroughly into the state of our defence forces, embracing all the three Services, and recommend far-reaching measures to modernize our defence set-up in every sense of the term.

In the course of such an inquiry, this commission should not hesitate to take expert advice from other friendly advanced countries, such as the USA, USSR and Britain.

Right through the ages, the Indian armies, which faced a myriad invasions of the country, never lacked in heroism and courage. But they lacked in matching weapons and generalship. A good general implies a disciplined and well-trained army.

This lesson has been indelibly inscribed on the nation's soul. It was further underlined by the 1962 war with China.

We must make up those grave deficiencies immediately before we are, once again, called upon to man our defences.

Obviously—notwithstanding its comparatively better performance against Pakistan in 1965—our Army needs a “face-lift,” indeed, a radical overhaul with a view to bringing it



abreast with the present-day concepts of warfare and weaponry, with their accent on individual initiative and mobility.

While the Indian Army clings to the British military system of the pre-War days, the British Army itself has undergone far-reaching changes. The divisional pattern of organization is being broken up in favour of flexible task forces and combat teams. For example, the traditional infantry-artillery-armour combinations are changing in favour of paratroop-helicopter-commando formations.

In the 1962 conflict, the Chinese army proved infinitely superior to the Indian Army in its mobility, iron discipline and trained adaptability to the terrain, even though it fought on our soil. Individual initiative is part of the Chinese training, with its accent on guerilla techniques.

Tied to the old British pattern, the Indian Army is still very much road-bound, and thus slow to adapt itself to the ways and requirements of high-altitude mountain warfare. I am conscious that much has been done in this direction since 1962. But, in my opinion, what has been done is not enough, and may amount to no more than tinkering with the problem.

Our major enemy is China, and our main theatre of fighting is going to be the Himalayan terrain in the north. If that is so, then our entire military thinking and tactical training have to be reorientated to that end. Hereafter, Pakistan is a secondary problem to us, and in any case, our Army would meet the Pakistani Army on familiar ground and terrain.

Yet another hang-over from the British tradition is the disproportionately long "admin tail" *vis-a-vis* the combatant element in the Indian Army. The Chinese are highly self-sufficient, with hardly any administrative paraphernalia, and therefore the proportion of effective combatant element in the Chinese formations is very high. Each Chinese soldier carries his own rations in his knapsack. He is, besides, hardier than the Javan.

In June 1967, Defence Minister Swaran Singh assured the Lok Sabha that his Ministry had succeeded in bringing down the "teeth-to-tail" ratio in the Indian Army from 57 : 43 to 62 : 38. This is creditable achievement, but not enough, considering that the Indian Army is faced with the Chinese on the other side, who are trained to be self-sufficient and to



live off the land and combine the highly flexible guerilla techniques with their war tactics.

The 1962 war with China showed up our inability to measure up to the Chinese war tactics in high-altitude mountainous terrain. The Indo-Pak conflict of 1965 further underlined the outmoded state of our Army's techniques, training and arms and equipment. Of the latter war, a well-known American military commentator wrote: "The Indian defensive posture proved efficient against the Pakistanis. This defence would however have been disastrous against a more imaginative enemy, one deploying flanking forces at night, utilizing paratroops and helicopter formations, striking with armoured infantry and combat engineers ahead of the tanks and attacking behind rolling artillery barrages and smokescreens."\*

Field-Marshal Sir William Slim, the man who led the British and Indian forces to victory against the Japanese in Burma in 1945, visualizes two main requirements in the army of the future: skilled and determined junior leaders, and self-reliant, physically hard, well-disciplined troops.

According to Sir William, success in future land operations will depend on the immediate availability of such leaders and such soldiers, ready to operate in small, independent formations. He adds, "The use of new weapons and technical devices can be quickly taught; to develop hardihood, initiative, mutual confidence and stark leadership takes longer."†

Because wars are fought between men rather than between weapons, the Field-Marshal concludes, "victory will still go, when armaments are even relatively equal, to the side which is better trained and of higher morale—advantages which are obtained neither easily, quickly, nor without the sacrifice of more than money in peace"—a lesson underlined by the Israeli victory in the lightning war with the Arabs in June 1967.

There is not the least doubt that the Indian Air Force constitutes a band of outstanding young men, daring and highly skilled. But they themselves will frankly admit that they could do with a bit of streamlining and a lot of modernization.

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\* Leo Heiman in February 1966 issue of the American Journal "Military Review".

† Field-Marshal Sir William, *Defeat into Victory*.



In 1962, the IAF's supply-dropping missions to our far-flung, isolated pickets and posts in the Himalayas were woefully ineffective and were generally a failure—and that was the only assistance they were called upon to render to our ground forces in their desperate straits.

In the 1965 conflict, the IAF acquitted itself creditably in its role in support of the ground forces, but the same could not be said of its strategic bombing missions. The IAF has yet to be tried on large-scale airlift missions and air-bridge supply operations.

Besides, the IAF's diversified equipment, with aircraft obtained from half a dozen countries, calls for a degree of rationalization, if it is not practicable to standardize repair, spare-parts and storage facilities.

The supreme place that the airforce occupies in modern warfare demands the highest priority for the IAF and the need to bring its thinking, training and equipment abreast of its counterparts in other modern countries of the West.

With the Chinese threat still very real along the 2,600-mile Himalayan front, we have yet to solve satisfactorily the problem of finding the right type of aircraft and equipment and arms for the ground forces operating in those altitudes, weather conditions and terrain.

And an imperative "must" is to find answers for the baffling logistical puzzles set by the craggy Himalayan terrain, where air-drops must continue to be the main medium of supply, even after we have succeeded in constructing a network of roads connecting up with the forward posts.

This aspect alone deserves a specially sustained research effort, including a close study of how other countries, with similar terrain and weather conditions, have tackled the problem. The plea trotted out by the Army HQ until 1960—namely that the areas are just physically inaccessible and therefore nothing much could be done about them—cannot wash.

Our Navy is indeed the Cinderella of the Defence Services. It is the most neglected, the least tried and the least impressive—for no fault of its personnel. Where countries like the UAR and Indonesia—even Pakistan has a couple—have dozens of submarines, we have none. Despite an inordinately



long coastline, a large merchant navy and an enormous maritime trade to protect, our Navy is still no more than a decorative show-piece—and at that not much of a show-piece either!

Its only aircraft-carrier is a decrepit affair, which has earned the nick-name “the sick old widow,” because most of the time it is in dry-dock and is hardly fit for action in war. It was in the dry-dock when the Indo-Pak conflict broke out in 1965.

In a post-World War II navy, the accent is on aircraft-carriers and submarines. We must have at least one more aircraft-carrier—which, of course, should be modern in its equipment and battle-worthy—apart from a pack of submarines, anti-aircraft ships and anti-submarine ships, if the Indian Navy is to discharge its duties effectively.

In fairness to the Defence Ministry, it must be conceded that since the 1962 debacle, an earnest effort has been put in to make up for lost time. Early in 1964, the Government sanctioned a Defence five-year plan, which aimed at a 825,000 Army and modernisation of its weapons and equipment; a 45-squadron air force, re-equipped with modern aircraft and provided with suitable ancillary facilities; and in the Navy, replacement of obsolete vessels with new foreign or Indian ships.

The five-year plan also envisaged the establishment of production facilities in order to reduce dependence on external sources of supply and construction and improvement of communications in the border areas and expansion of the research organisation. The Plan was to cost Rs. 5,000 crores.

Indeed, Mr. Robert McNamara, U.S. Defence Secretary in his annual review for 1968, placed India in the first position as a military power in Asia outside the Communist orbit. He stated that as against a total of 2.3 million Chinese forces, “with a limited ability to attack beyond their borders,” Indian troops now number 1.1 million men who should be able to defend their country against Chinese aggression”.

He further stated that Indian forces now had more firepower per man than the Chinese, and “with vastly improved communications and transportation, can move quickly to reinforce critical areas.”\*

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\* H. R. Vohra in a dispatch in the *Times of India* dated 15-2-68.



A vital void in our defence set-up at present would appear to be an apparatus that concerns itself with "grand strategy," that does the strategic thinking in relation to the country's foreign policy, nursing a cell that carries out research in depth in the sphere of strategy, embracing social, economic and political factors.

Such an expert and authoritative apparatus would feed the Chiefs of Staff Committee with authentic data which would enable the latter to tender right advice to the Government on the impact of the country's foreign policy on its defence capacity. For, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, if it is to discharge its legitimate duties, should not function merely as a mechanical instrument of carrying out the Government's policies, but should think and advice and help to shape those policies so as to match them with the country's defence capability.

Such an effective apparatus is all the more essential in a country like India where politicians manning the Government are amateurish, if not ignorant, on defence matters, and have to be fed with correct and well-thought-out advice from the military set-up.

Perhaps the system introduced in Britain, following the constitution of a Defence Ministry in 1964, might meet our requirements. There, they have instituted a Defence Staff Committee, with the Chief of the Defence Staff (from the military profession) as Chairman, and Chief of the Naval Staff, Chief of the General (Army) Staff and Chief of the Air staff, as the other members of the Committee.

As Chairman of the Committee, Chief of the Defence Staff is responsible for tendering the Committee's collective advice to the Secretary of State. The Chiefs of Staff Committee are collectively responsible to the Government for professional advice on strategy and military operations and on the military implications of the defence policy.

The Chief of the Defence Staff is one of the three principal advisers to the Secretary of State for Defence (i.e. Defence Minister) in parallel with the Permanent Under-Secretary of State and the Chief Scientific Adviser.

Survival being more important than development—Defence Minister Chavan subscribed to this thesis in a speech during the 1967 budget session of Parliament—it is time the Govern-



ment set about to obtain a thorough and authentic appreciation of the country's overall defence requirements in the modern context and set to work on a high-priority programme to that end.

In a newly-emerged, underdeveloped country, beset with menacing centrifugal pulls, the Army is charged with the additional duty of protecting the State against forces of disruption and defending its integrity.

The Army has frequently to intervene in civil strife, and may, in the future, even be called upon to crush assaults on the stability and integrity of the State by organized Communist guerillas or regional chauvinists out to undermine Central Authority.

At the rate the political situation is deteriorating in the country, that eventuality cannot be ruled out. Indeed, the Communists seemed to have already made a beginning in West Bengal, in Naxalbari, Twenty-four Parganas, Asansol and elsewhere. The West Bengal Communists have been freely speaking of starting a guerilla rebellion in that State.

Further, the Indian Army is being constantly called upon to tackle tribal turbulence along the north-eastern frontier. In Nagaland and the Mizo district, they have been up against a regular guerilla war.

It is time therefore that the Indian Army is given training in guerilla warfare and counter-insurgency, which call for specialized techniques and tactics, with the twin accent on mobile striking forces and close territorial control. Counter-insurgency training also implies a knowledge and understanding of the political and social terrain of the area to which an Army unit may be assigned.

Let it be realized by the top brass that a modern army has to be politically-conscious and able intelligently to follow political developments in the country, if it is to discharge its duties efficiently and effectively.



## EPILOGUE

### AMBIVALENCE IN POLICIES

FOREIGN POLICY is defined as a country's policy towards its neighbour.

Rooted in anti-colonialism and non-alignment—both objectives have by now nearly expended themselves—India's foreign policy today finds itself out of joint with the compulsions springing from her relations with her neighbours, China and Pakistan.

Indeed, this gaping hiatus between our policy and the needs of the actual situation was primarily responsible for the imbroglio in which we found ourselves in the India-China conflict of 1962.

Even towards Pakistan, I am afraid I am unable to discern on the part of our Government a conscious, purposeful policy—though Pakistan seems to have a method and consistency about its stance towards India. Had we one, we would not have committed so many solecisms and been driven to improvise from moment to moment.

If our foreign and defence policies appear Pak-oriented, it is so more by way of instinctive, reflex action than by aforethought design. At the mention of Kashmir, we react sharply by sheer force of habit and passion, even as Pavlov's dogs salivated on hearing the bell ring.

Then again, a foreign policy without a correlated defence capacity to back it, is impotent. A defence capacity unrelated to foreign policy is pointless. And foreign policy outrunning a country's defence resources is indeed reckless and suicidal.

A realistic foreign policy has, therefore, to be reined, even trimmed, to measure up with the country's defence resources. Then, again, often defence priorities may have to be stretched to meet the needs of the country's foreign policy. The two must always keep in step if a country is to avoid disaster.

In the becalmed fifties, New Delhi failed to see these patent truths. Hence the grim lessons brought home to us in 1962. Those lessons underlined the interdependence between a country's foreign policy and its defence capacity and, there-



fore, the need for the closest possible liaison between the Foreign Office and the defence set-up or the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee.

They also emphasized the imperative need of constant review at the Armed Forces HQ of the country's foreign policy with a view to adjusting and refocussing the defence capability in order to meet the requirements of the latest twist and turn of foreign policy. Not to do so is to court disaster, as we realized in 1962, to our great cost.

In a preceding chapter we have discussed measures to strengthen the defence set-up so as to enable it to discharge effectively its duty in behalf of the country's external security.

The Armed Forces HQ or the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee is the watch-dog of the country's security and safety, and therefore it owes a duty to the country frankly to warn the Government when the foreign policy fails to keep in step with defence capacity. The Armed Forces HQ grievously failed to discharge that duty in the decade that preceded the 1962 crisis.

Not until 1960, by which time the bells had already begun to toll, did the Army HQ wake up to the grim realities along the northern border, and then it was pretty late. The Army HQ's own appreciation in 1960 placed the prospective Chinese attack in 1963. It came a year earlier.

From January 1962, we find the Government prodding the Army HQ to take the plunge, and the latter protesting that it could not be done with the resources at their disposal.

And so, it was with this psychology of diffidence and consciousness of the many deficiencies in their defences oppressing them that the Indian forces went into action in the autumn of 1962.

There is, however, no doubt that if we had taken full advantage of the twelve-year "notice period" and devoted all our energies to building up our defences along the 2,600-mile Tibetan border and to solving their logistical problems, India would have defended herself much more effectively in 1962. We would have anticipated the Chinese attack and fully prepared to meet it, both militarily and diplomatically.

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General K. S. Thimayya, Chief of the Army Staff until 1961, in the *Seminar* of July 1962 (three months before the Chinese struck) admitted :

"Whereas in the case of Pakistan I have considered the possibility of a total war, I am afraid I cannot do so in regard to China. I cannot even, as a soldier, envisage India taking on China in an open conflict on its own. China's present strength in manpower, equipment and aircraft exceeds our resources a hundredfold with the full support of USSR, and we could never hope to match China in the foreseeable future. It must be left to the politicians and diplomats to ensure our security."

Such were also obviously the views Thimayya officially, as Chief of the Army Staff, presented to the Defence Minister. But to Krishna Menon his advice was redundant, as the Government were convinced that the Chinese would never attack India !

It did not, however, need a General to state that patent truth. Even without Soviet support, China was infinitely stronger militarily than India. With the Sino-Pak collusion now a hard reality, in the next conflict with China or Pakistan, we would be up against a war on two fronts. It is as clear as a pikestaff, therefore, that our Army could not cope with such a task, and the defence security of our country has to be further reinforced through political and diplomatic channels.

If we had not hugged illusions, the logic of the situation would have driven us betimes to supplement our military preparedness with diplomatic effort, through alliances and collective security measures taken in concert with like-minded countries of the world. That would have been a foreign policy founded on India's self-interest and self-preservation, as every country's foreign policy should be.

With China getting increasingly unpopular—and increasingly feared—among its neighbours in particular and in the world in general, one can visualize a whole string of like-minded countries in East Asia, and outside too, whose self-interest, ideology and instinct of survival dictate the need effectively to curb Communist China's expansionist menace. India is therefore in good company.



Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Ceylon, South Viet Nam, South Korea, even Burma and Cambodia are equally exercised by Peking's threat to peace in East Asia. Indeed, we could count in this group, Japan and Australia too.

Communist China's naked aggression against India in 1962 alerted them all and underlined the United States' conviction that Peking is a standing threat to world peace.

If only a major Asian power like India would take the lead in organizing defence against a common danger, the aforementioned countries of Asia would gratefully rally round that power. That indeed has been the United States' goal and dream in South East Asia.

This was the concept that the late John Foster Dulles was propagating in the early fifties. Later, President Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson publicly advocated the proposition that India and Japan should jointly lead a movement in the region to contain Chinese expansionism.

From Washington's viewpoint the ideal arrangement for checkmating Communist China in East Asia is that major democratic powers and natural leaders of the region, namely India and Japan, should lead the movement for the collective security of South East Asia against the Peking threat.

Having failed to achieve the ideal—mainly because of Nehru's refusal to oblige—the Americans then attempted the next best, which was to bolster up puppet regimes in the smaller countries on the periphery of China. This latter policy has proved a colossal failure.

So, minds in the State Department are harking back to the earlier ideal, all the more so since 1962 when, they believed, India had at last been converted to their viewpoint.

In 1961, in an interview to me in his office in New York, Adlai Stevenson impatiently declared: "Tell your Nehru, we are fighting his battles in South East Asia. He ought to know what is good for his country!" Stevenson, the US Ambassador to the U.N., expatiated on the theme of India and Japan, the two top Asian nations, leading an indigenous, regional collective security set-up to contain Chinese expansionism in East Asia.

The late President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Viet Nam said



to me in 1956 in Saigon that he looked upon India as the "natural and logical" leader of the non-Communist countries of South East Asia, and that he, for one, was prepared faithfully to follow Nehru's lead in such a crusade.

Burma is an apprehensive neutral, seeking to keep on the right side of a dangerous neighbour. The anti-China demonstrations in Rangoon and anti-Burma demonstrations in Peking in June last have brought to the surface Burma's fear and distrust of its belligerent neighbour. Dipping into its typical Billingsgate diplomatic style, Peking has called names at President Ne Win and threatened to get him overthrown and it has already incited the Burmese Communists to rise in rebellion against him.

Cambodia is too close to Communist China to dare to be anything other than "neutral on Peking's side." Prince Sihanouk has however made no bones about the compulsions, rather than affection, that binds his little State to Peking.

North Viet Nam and North Korea are ideological allies of China though the people of North Viet Nam nurse a traditional and historical antipathy, if not hatred, towards the Chinese.

The rest of the countries of South and East Asia have a clear identity of interests with India in wanting to contain Communist Chinese expansionism.

In the new set of circumstances, when Washington and Moscow are increasingly beginning to see eye to eye not only on issues of world peace but on the Chinese menace to world peace and to their own international interests, a regional mutual security pact on the lines suggested here, should be able to obtain the blessings of both the USA and the Soviet Union.

In the early fifties the world witnessed the spectacle of polarization of international politics between the West and the East (Communist) blocs, led respectively by Washington and Moscow. The mid-sixties found the kaleidoscope of international politics shaken to a new pattern, with nuclear China forcing its place at the top to bring about a three-cornered tussle, in which Washington and Moscow find an identity of self-interest in keeping the bellicose new arrival firmly in check.



In this triangular pattern, the policy of non-alignment becomes meaningless unless it is re-fashioned and interpreted anew to meet the current needs of the international situation. For New Delhi today, non-alignment must mean an equidistant link and bridge between Washington and Moscow, rather than an equidistant isolation from the two.

If Moscow and Washington could get so close as to collaborate with each other on international issues—the latest instance was the handling of the Arab-Israeli war by the Big Two at the UN—surely India could simultaneously get close to both, without alienating either, to forge a Washington-Moscow-New Delhi axis to concert measures effectively to meet the threat of a common enemy.

Incidentally, in Peking's latest list of enemies, the order of priority would appear to be Moscow, Washington and then New Delhi.

The United States will always warmly welcome any move in which India would be the spearhead of an anti-China rally in South East Asia. There is little doubt that the Soviet Union too would approve of such an initiative on the part of India.

If only those guiding the destinies of India could muster courage and imagination and play their cards skilfully, New Delhi could once again capture the initiative in the international arena, under good auspices, with all the economic, political and military benefits flowing therefrom.

In a world of interdependence, to construe collaboration with another country as a stultifying dependence on that country is to indulge in outmoded, if not perverse, thinking. In the case of China, we are up against a menace which cannot be met without our collaboration with others and collective security. It is time that our policy-makers in New Delhi realized this stark reality.

If Marxist dogma could be re-interpreted by Soviet Russia to meet the needs of the times, certainly India's non-alignment, originally fashioned by the conditions obtaining in 1950, could be re-defined to fit into the changed circumstances of 1967.

To every country in the bloc of uncommitted nations, except India, non-alignment is no more than a utilitarian



instrument of policy for promoting self-interest in the international sphere. To India alone, it would appear, non-alignment is a rigid dogma, not the means to an end, but an end in itself.

And yet, even in the case of India, initially, her policy of non-alignment was rooted deeply in self-interest and self-preservation when in her early years of independence, she passionately desired to keep out of dangerous international entanglements so as to be able to devote herself, undistracted, to economic development and progress.

To Nasser of Egypt, non-alignment is no more than an instrument to promote the fundamentals of his foreign policy, which are concentrated in the Arab aim to wipe out Israel from the map of West Asia—that Nasser's latest brinkmanship in June 1967 recoiled on him is a different story. UAR's defence capability was sought to be built up and directed to that end. Pakistan's entire military posture is India-oriented, synchronizing with her foreign policy, which is solely directed at India.

It is time an element of flexibility was introduced into our foreign policy, so that it is converted into an effective instrument of promoting India's defence security and survival.

Above all, it has to be realized that the success of international relations and comradely collaboration depends upon the hard-headed principle of *quid pro quo*—of reciprocity: on what we can give to a country in return for what we desire to take from it. For the truth is that the valuable, firm "friend-in-need" relationship between nations has to be based on a reciprocal *quid pro quo*.

Somehow, the policy of non-alignment as we practise it, seems to come in the way of such close, warm, utilitarian international friendships.



## APPENDIXES







## APPENDIX I

Official translation by New China News Agency of the text of the Chinese government's statement of November 21, 1962 :—

In the past two years, first in the western and then in the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian border, Indian troops crossed the line of actual control between China and India, nibbled Chinese territory, set up strong-points for aggression and provoked a number of border clashes.

Relying on the advantageous military positions they occupied and having made full preparations, the Indian troops eventually launched massive armed attacks all along the line on the Chinese frontier guards on October 20, 1962.

This border conflict deliberately provoked by India has been going on for a month.

The Chinese Government served repeated warnings in regard to the increasingly serious Indian encroachments and provocations and pointed out the gravity of their consequences. The Chinese frontier guards all along maintained self-restraint and forbearance in order to avert any border conflict.

However, all these efforts by China proved of no avail, and the Indian acts of aggression steadily increased.

Pressed beyond these limits of endurance and left with no room for retreat, the Chinese frontier guards finally had no choice but to strike back resolutely in self-defence. After the present large-scale border conflict broke out, the Chinese Government quickly took initiative measures in an effort to extinguish the flames of conflict that had been kindled.

On October 24, that is, four days after the outbreak of the current border clashes, the Chinese Government put forward three reasonable proposals for stopping the border clashes, reopening peaceful negotiations and settling the Sino-Indian boundary question. The three proposals are as follows :

(1) Both parties affirm that the Sino-Indian boundary question must be settled peacefully through negotiations. Pending a peaceful settlement, the Chinese Government hopes that the Indian Government will agree that both parties respect the line of actual control between the two sides along the entire Sino-Indian border, and the armed forces of each side withdraw 20 km. from this line and disengage.

(2) Provided that the Indian Government agrees to the above proposal, the Chinese Government is willing, through consultations between the two parties, to withdraw its frontier guards in the eastern sector of the border to the north of the line of actual control ; at the same time both China and India undertake not to cross the line of actual control, i.e., the traditional customary line, in the middle and western sectors of the border.

Matters relating to the disengagement of the armed forces of the



two parties and the cessation of armed conflict shall be negotiated by officials designated by the Chinese and Indian Governments respectively.

(3) The Chinese Government considers that, in order to seek a friendly settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question, talks should be held once again by the Prime Ministers of China and India. At a time considered to be appropriate by both parties, the Chinese Government would welcome the Indian Prime Minister to Peking; if this should be inconvenient to the Indian Government the Chinese Premier would be ready to go to Delhi for talks.

On the very day it received them, the Indian Government hastily rejected the Chinese Government's three proposals and instead (demanded) that the Chinese Government should agree to restore the state of the boundary as it prevailed prior to September 8, 1962, that is to say, India wanted to reoccupy large tracts of Chinese territory so that the Indian troops might regain the position from which they could launch massive armed attacks on the Chinese frontier guards at any time.

In his reply to Premier Chou En-lai dated November 1, Prime Minister Nehru put forward even more unreasonable demands which, on the one hand, required the Chinese Government to agree to the Indian troops reverting to their positions prior to September 8, and, on the other hand, required the Chinese frontier guards not only to withdraw to their positions as on September 8 but to retreat farther in the western sector to the so called positions of November 7, 1959, as defined for them by India unilaterally, that is, requiring China to cede to 6000 square miles (13000 to 15000 km.) more of Chinese territory.

In the meantime, the Indian Government relying on large amounts of US military aid, again launched powerful attacks in the eastern and western sectors of the Sino-Indian border in an obstinate attempt to expand the border conflict.

It is by no means accidental that the Indian government has taken such an extremely unreasonable attitude. To meet the needs of its internal and external politics, the Indian Government has long pursued the policy of deliberately keeping the Sino-Indian boundary question unsettled, keeping the armed forces of the two countries engaged and maintaining tension along the Sino-Indian border.

Whenever it considered the time favourable, the Indian Government made use of this situation to carry out armed invasion and provocation on the Sino-Indian border, and even went the length of provoking an armed clash. Or else it made use of the situation to conduct 'cold war' against China.

The experience of many years shows that the Indian Government has invariably tried, by hook or by crook, to block the path which was opened up by the Chinese Government for a peaceful settlement



of the Sino-Indian boundary question. This policy of the Indian Government runs diametrically counter to the fundamental interests of the Chinese and Indian peoples and the common desires of all the peoples of the world, and serves only the interests of imperialism.

The Chinese Government's three proposals are most fair and reasonable ; they are the only proposals capable of averting border clashes, ensuring border tranquillity and bringing about a peaceful settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question.

The Chinese Government perseveres in these three proposals.

However the Indian Government has so far rejected these three proposals and continued to expand the border conflict, thus daily aggravating the Sino-Indian border situation. To reverse this trend, the Chinese Government has decided to take initiative measure in order to promote the realisation of these three proposals.

The Chinese Government hereby declares the following :

(1) Beginning from the day following that of the issuance of the present statement, i.e., from 00.00 hours on November 22, 1962, the Chinese frontier guards will cease fire along the entire Sino-Indian border.

(2) Beginning from December 1, 1962, the Chinese frontier guards will withdraw to positions 20 km behind the line of actual control which existed between China and India on November 7, 1959.

In the eastern sector, although the Chinese frontier guards have so far been fighting back in self-defence on Chinese territory north of the traditional customary line, they are prepared to withdraw from their present positions to the north of the line of actual control, that is, north of the illegal McMahon Line, and to withdraw 20 km farther back from that line.

In the middle and western sectors, the Chinese frontier guards will withdraw 20 km from the line of actual control.

(3) In order to ensure the normal movement of the inhabitants in the Sino-Indian border area, forestall the activities of saboteurs and maintain order there, China will set up checkpoints at a number of places on its side of the line of actual control with a certain number of civil police assigned to each checkpoint. The Chinese Government will notify the Indian Government of the location of these checkpoints through diplomatic channels.

These measures taken by the Chinese Government on its own initiative demonstrate its great sincerity for stopping the border conflict and settling the Sino-Indian boundary question peacefully.

It should be pointed out, in particular, that, after withdrawing, the Chinese frontier guards will be far behind their positions prior to September 8, 1962. The Chinese Government hopes that, as a result of the above-mentioned initiative measures taken by China, the Indian Government will take into consideration the desires of the Indian people and peoples of the world, make a new



start and give a positive response.

Provided that the Indian Government agrees to take corresponding measures, the Chinese and Indian Governments can immediately appoint officials to meet at places agreed upon by both parties in the various sectors of the Sino-Indian border to discuss matters relating to the 20 km withdrawal of the armed forces of each party to form a demilitarised zone, the establishment of checkpoints by each party on its side of the line of actual control as well as the return of captured personnel.

When the tasks between the officials of the two parties have yielded results and the results have been put into effect, talks can be held by the Prime Ministers of the two countries for further seeking an amicable settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question.

The Chinese Government would welcome the Indian Prime Minister to Peking and if this should be inconvenient to the Indian Government, the Chinese Premier would be ready to go to Delhi for the talks.

The Chinese Government sincerely hopes that the Indian Government will make a positive response. Even if the Indian Government fails to make such a response in good time, the Chinese Government will take the initiative to carry out the above-mentioned measures as scheduled.

However the Chinese Government cannot but take into account the following possible eventualities:—

1. that the Indian troops should continue their attack after the Chinese frontier guards have ceased fire and when they are withdrawing;

2. that, after the Chinese frontier guards have withdrawn 20 km from the entire line of actual control, the Indian troops should again advance to the line of actual control in the eastern, i.e., the illegal McMahon Line, and/or refuse to withdraw, but remain on the line of actual control in the middle and western sectors; and

3. that, after the Chinese frontier guards have withdrawn 20 km from the entire line of actual control, the Indian troops should cross the line of actual control and recover their positions prior to September 8, that is to say, again cross the illegal McMahon line and re-occupy the Kechilang river area north of the line in the eastern sector, re-occupy Wuji in the middle sector, and restore their 43 strong-points for aggression in the Chip Chap River valley, the Galwan River valley, the Pangong Lake area, and the Demchok area or set up more strong-points for aggression on Chinese territory in the western sector.

The Chinese Government solemnly declares that should the above eventualities occur, it reserves the right to strike back in self-defence and the Indian Government will be held completely responsible for all the grave consequences arising therefor.

The people of the world will then see even more clearly who is



peace-loving and who is bellicose, who upholds friendship between the Chinese and Indian peoples and Asian-African solidarity and who is undermining them, who is protecting the common interests of the Asian and African peoples in their struggle against imperialism and colonialism and who is violating and damaging these common interests.

The Sino-Indian boundary question is an issue between two Asian countries. China and India should settle this issue peacefully; they should not cross swords on account of this issue and even less allow us imperialism to poke in its hand and develop the present unfortunate border conflict into a war in which Asians are made to fight Asians.

It is from its consistent stand of protecting fundamental interests of the Chinese and Indian peoples, strengthening Asian-African solidarity and preserving world peace that the Chinese Government calls upon all Asian and African countries and all peace-loving countries and peoples to exert efforts to urge the Indian Government to take corresponding measures so as to stop the border conflict, reopen peaceful negotiations and settle the Sino-Indian boundary question.



## APPENDIX II

### STATEMENT BY THE DEFENCE MINISTER REGARDING NEFA ENQUIRY

NEW DELHI, September 2, 1963.

The Defence Minister, Shri Y. B. Chavan, made the following statement in the Lok Sabha today :

1. Sir, I wish to inform the House of the results of the enquiry to investigate our reverses in the operations occasioned by the Chinese aggression across our northern borders during the months of October-November 1962.

2. Though the officers appointed to enquire into these reverses were asked to examine the operations with particular reference to the Kameng Division of NEFA, they quite rightly came to the conclusion that the developments in NEFA were closely co-related to those in Ladakh and their study of NEFA operations had to be carried out in conjunction with developments and operations in the Ladakh sector. Thus, the enquiry made and the conclusions emerging from it are results of study into the entire operations on our northern borders.

3. As I had informed the House on 1st April, in reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, with my approval the Chief of Army Staff had ordered a thorough investigation to be carried out to find as to what was wrong with.

- (i) our training ;
- (ii) our equipment ;
- (iii) our system of command ;
- (iv) the physical fitness of our troops; and
- (v) the capacity of our Commanders at all levels to influence the men under them.

4. While conveying to the House the terms of reference of this enquiry, I had made it clear that the underlying idea in holding this enquiry is to derive military lessons. It was meant to bring out clearly what were the mistakes or deficiencies in the past, so as to ensure that in future such mistakes are not repeated and such deficiencies are quickly made up. Consequently, the enquiring officers had to study in great and intimate detail extent of our preparedness at the time the planning and strategic concepts behind it and the way those plans were adjusted in the course of operations. This also necessitated the examination of the developments and events prior to hostilities as also the plans, posture and the strength of the Army at the outbreak of hostility. In the course of the enquiry a very detailed review of the actual operations in both the sectors had to be carried out with reference to terrain,



strategy, tactics and deployment of our troops.

5. The conclusions drawn at the end of the report flow from examination of all these matters in great detail. In these circumstances, I am sure, the House would appreciate that by the very nature of the contents it would not be in the public interest to lay the report on the table of the House. Nor is it possible to attempt even an abridged or edited version of it, consistent with the consideration of security, that would not give an unbalanced or incomplete picture to you.

6. I have given deep thought to this matter and it is with great regret that I have to withhold this document from this august House. The publication of this report which contains information about the strength and development of our Forces and their locations would be of invaluable use to our enemies. It would not only endanger our security but affect the morale of those entrusted with safeguarding the security of our borders.

### MAIN CONCLUSIONS

7. Before I turn to the main conclusions of this enquiry may I bring to the notice of the House, that I had already made clear, that this enquiry is the type of enquiry which the Prime Minister had in mind when he promised such an enquiry to the House in November 1962 into the state of military unpreparedness to meet the Chinese invasion. I would like to assure the House that we had at the outset made it clear to those who were entrusted with this enquiry, and they in turn made it clear to the persons whom they found necessary to examine, that our main intention was to derive lessons to help in our future preparedness and not in any way undertake a witch-hunt into the culpabilities of those who were concerned with or took part in these operations. This was absolutely essential to get a full factual picture of the situation as it obtained in October-November 1962. I may specially mention this to remind the House that in considering these matters, we should never miss the proper sense of perspective or say or do things which could only give heart to the enemy and demoralise our own men. I have no doubt that the House would wish to ensure this spirit to be maintained.

8. The enquiring officers submitted their report to the Chief of Army Staff on 12th May 1963. After obtaining some complementary information the Chief of Army Staff submitted this report along with his comments to me on 2nd July. Considering the enormous mass of details that had to be gone into with meticulous care by the enquiring officers, as I have myself seen, I would consider that the report has been completed with commendable speed.

### TRAINING OF JAWANS

9. The first question in the terms of reference was whether our training was found wanting.



The enquiry has revealed that our basic training was sound and soldiers adapted themselves to the mountains adequately. It is admitted that the training of our troops did not have orientation towards operations vis-a-vis the particular terrain in which the troops had to operate. Our training of the troops did not have a slant for a war being launched by China. Thus our troops had no requisite knowledge of the Chinese tactics, and ways of war, their weapons, equipment and capabilities. Knowledge of the enemy helps to build up confidence and morale, so essential to the Jawan on the front.

10. The enquiry has revealed that there is certainly need for toughening and battle inoculation. It is, therefore, essential that battle schools are opened at training centres and formations, so that gradual toughening and battle inoculation can be carried out.

11. It has also revealed that the main aspect of training as well as the higher Commanders' concept of mountain warfare requires to be put right.

12. Training alone, however, without correct leadership will pay little dividends. Thus the need of the moment, above all else, is training in leadership.

### SHORTAGE OF EQUIPMENT

13. The second question was about our equipment. The enquiry has confirmed that there was indeed an overall shortage of equipment both for training and during operations. But it was not always the case that particular equipment was not available at all with the Armed Forces anywhere in the country. The crucial difficulty in many cases was that, while the equipment could be reached to the last point in the plains or even beyond it, it was another matter to reach it in time, mostly by air or by animal or by human transport to the forward formations, who took the brunt of fighting. This position of logistics was aggravated by two factors :

- (i) The fast rate at which troops had to be inducted, mostly from plains to high mountain areas ; and
- (ii) Lack of properly built roads and other means of communication.

14. This situation was aggravated and made worse because of overall shortage as far as vehicles were concerned and as our fleet was too old and its efficiency not adequate for operating on steep gradients and mountain terrain.

15. Thus, in brief, though the enquiry revealed overall shortage of equipment, it has also revealed that our weapons were adequate to fight the Chinese and compared favourably with theirs. The automatic rifle would have helped in the cold climate and is being introduced. The enquiry has pinpointed the need to make up deficiency in equipment, particularly suited for mountain warfare, but more so to provide means and modes



of communication to make it available to the troops at the right place at the right time. Work on these lines has already been taken in hand and is progressing vigorously.

### SYSTEM OF COMMAND

16. The third question is regarding our *system of command* within the Armed Forces. The enquiry has revealed that there is basically nothing wrong with the system and chain of command, provided it is exercised in accepted manner at various levels. There is, however, need for realisation of responsibilities at various levels, which must work with trust and confidence in each other. It is also revealed that during the operations, difficulties arose only when there was departure from accepted chain of command. There again, such departure occurred mainly due to haste and lack of adequate prior planning.

17. The enquiry has also revealed the practice that crept in the higher Army formations of interfering in tactical details even to the extent of detailing troops for specified tasks. It is the duty of Commanders in the field to make on-the-spot decisions, when so required, and details of operations ought to have been left to them.

### PHYSICAL FITNESS OF TROOPS

18. The fourth question is of physical fitness of our troops. It is axiomatic that an unacclimatised army cannot be as fit as one which is. The enquiry has revealed that, despite this, our troops both officers and men, stood the rigours of the climate, although most of them were rushed at short notice from plains. Thus in brief, troops were physically fit in every way from their normal tasks, but they were not acclimatised to fight at the heights at which some of them were asked to make a stand. Where acclimatisation had taken place, such as in Ladakh, the height factor presented no difficulty. Among some middle-age-group officers, there had been deterioration in standards of physical fitness. This is a matter which is being rectified. The physical fitness among junior officers was good and is now even better.

### CAPACITY OF COMMANDERS

19. The fifth point in the terms of reference was about the capacity of the Commanders at all levels during these operations to influence the men under their command. By and large, it has been found that general standard amongst the junior officers was fair. At unit level there were good and mediocre Commanding Officers. The proportion of good Commanding Officers and not-so-good was perhaps the same as obtained in any army in the last World War. At Brigade level, but for the odd exception, Commanders were able to adequately exercise their command. It was at higher levels that shortcomings became more apparent. It was also revealed that some of the higher Commanders did not



depend enough on the initiative of the lower Commanders, who alone could have the requisite knowledge of the terrain and local conditions of troops under them.

### OTHER ASPECTS EXAMINED

20. Apart from these terms of reference, the enquiry went into some other important aspects pertaining to the operations, and I would like to inform the House about this also. This relates to the following three aspects:

- (i) Our intelligence ;
- (ii) Our Staff Work and Procedures ; and
- (iii) Our "Higher Direction of Operations".

21. As regards, our system and organisation of intelligence, it would obviously not be proper for me to disclose any details. However, it is known that in the Army Headquarters, there is a Directorate of Intelligence under an officer designated as Director of Military Intelligence, briefly known as DMI.

22. The enquiry has brought out that the *collection* of intelligence in general was not satisfactory. The acquisition of intelligence was slow and the reporting of it vague.

23. Second important aspect of intelligence is its *collection* and evaluation. Admittedly, because of the vague nature of intelligence, evaluation may not have been accurate. Thus a clear picture of the Chinese build-up was not made available. No attempt was made to link up the new enemy build-up with the old deployment. Thus field formations had little guidance whether there were fresh troops or old ones moving to new locations.

24. The third aspect is dissemination of intelligence. It has come out that much faster means must be employed to send out processed and important information to field formations, if it is to be of any use.

25. There is no doubt that a major overhauling of the intelligence system is required. A great deal has been done during the last six months. The overhauling of the intelligence system is a complex and lengthy task and, in view of its vital importance, I am paying personal attention to this.

### STAFF WORK AND PROCEDURES

26. Now about our staff work and procedures. There are clear procedures of staff work laid down at all levels. The enquiry has however revealed that much more attention will have to be given, than was done in the past, in the work and procedures of the General Staff at the Services Headquarters, as well as in the Command Headquarters and below, to long-term operational planning, including logistics as well as to the problems of co-ordination between various Services Headquarters. So, one major lesson learnt



is that the quality of General Staff Work, and the depth of its prior planning in time, is going to be one of the most crucial factors in our future preparedness.

### DIRECTION OF OPERATIONS

27. That brings me to the next point which is called the higher direction of operations. Even the largest and the best equipped of armies need to be given proper policy guidance and major directives by the Government, whose instrument it is. These must bear a reasonable relation to the size of the army and state of its equipment from time to time. An increase in the size or improving the equipment of army costs not only money but also needs them.

### LAST YEAR'S REVERSES

28. The reverses that our Armed Forces admittedly suffered were due to a variety of causes and weaknesses as stated above. While this enquiry has gone deeply into those causes it has also confirmed that the attack was so sudden and in such remote and isolated sectors that the Indian Army as a whole was really not tested. In that period of less than two months last year, only about 24,000 of our troops were actually involved in fighting. Of these, those in Ladakh did an excellent job even when overwhelmed and outnumbered. In the Eastern-most sector, though the troops had to withdraw in the face of vastly superior enemy strength from Walong, they withdrew in an orderly manner and took their toll. It was only in the Kameng sector that the Army suffered a series of reverses. These battles were fought on our remotest borders and were at heights not known to the Army and at places which geographically had all the disadvantages for our troops and many advantages for the enemy. But such initial reverses are a part of the tides of war and what matters most is who wins the last battle.

### THE FOURTH DIVISION

29. Before I end, I would like to add a word about the famous "Fourth Division", which took part in these operations. It is indeed said that this famous Division had to sacrifice its good name in these series of reverses. It is still sadder that this Division during the actual operations was only "Fourth Division" in name, for it was not fighting with its original formations intact. Troops from different formations had to be rushed to the borders to fight under the banner of the "Fourth Division", while the original formations of the Division itself were deployed elsewhere. I am confident, and I am sure the House would share with me that the famous "Fourth Division" would live to win many more battles if there is any future aggression against our country.

30. Before I conclude, I would like to mention that we have



certainly not waited for this report to be in our hands to take corrective action. The process of taking corrective action had started simultaneously with the institution of this enquiry and the House would recollect that I had informed it of the same.

31. What happened at Se la and Bomdi-La were severe reverses for us, but we must remember that other countries with powerful defence forces have sometimes suffered in the initial stages of a war. The aggressor has a certain advantage, more especially when the aggression is sudden and well-prepared. We are now on the alert and well on the way of preparedness, and this enquiry while bringing home to us our various weaknesses and mistakes would also help to strengthen our defence preparedness and our entire conduct of such operations.



### APPENDIX III

#### PROPOSALS OF THE CONFERENCE OF SIX NON- ALIGNED NATIONS HELD AT COLOMBO (December 10 to 12, 1962)

1. The Conference considers that the existing *de facto* cease-fire period is a good starting point for a peaceful settlement of the Indian-Chinese conflict.

2. (a) With regard to the Western Sector, the Conference would like to make an appeal to the Chinese Government to carry out their 20 kilometres withdrawal of their military posts as has been proposed in the letter of Prime Minister Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru of November 21 and November 28, 1962.

(b) The Conference would make an appeal to the Indian Government to keep their existing military position.

(c) Pending a final solution of the border dispute, the area vacated by the Chinese military withdrawals will be a demilitarized zone to be administered by civilian posts of both sides to be agreed upon, without prejudice to the rights of the previous presence of both India and China in that area.

3. With regard to the Eastern Sector, the Conference considers that the line of actual control in the areas recognised by both the Governments could serve as a ceasefire line to their respective positions. Remaining areas in this sector can be settled in their future discussions.

4. With regard to the problems of the Middle Sector, the Conference suggests that they will be solved by peaceful means, without resorting to force.

5. The Conference believes that these proposals, which could help in consolidating the ceasefire, once implemented, should pave the way for discussions between representatives of both parties for the purpose of solving problems entailed in the ceasefire position.

6. The Conference would like to make it clear that a positive response for the proposed appeal will not prejudice the position of either of the two Governments as regards its conception of the final alignment of the boundaries.

#### *The Principles Underlying the Proposals of the Six\**

1. The Sino-Indian boundary dispute must be settled by peaceful negotiations between China and India. The object of the Six is to create an atmosphere which would enable China and India to enter upon negotiations with dignity and self-respect.

2. The proposals of the Six are intended to create such an atmosphere.

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\* Document given by the Representatives of the Colombo Conference to the Chinese Government at Peking.



3. In considering the proposals made by them, the Six welcomed the announcement of a unilateral cease-fire and withdrawal made by China on November 21, 1962.

4. In the formulation of these proposals, the Six paid particular attention to the following principles :—

- (a) neither side should be in a position to derive benefit from military operations ;
- (b) a stable ceasefire must precede any attempt at negotiations between China and India ;
- (c) any ceasefire arrangements must be without prejudice to the boundary claims of either party ;
- (d) in the establishment of a stable ceasefire, neither side should be requested to withdraw from territory which is admittedly theirs, or from territory over which they exercised exclusive civilian administration ;
- (e) the establishment of a stable ceasefire may or may not, according to circumstances, require the establishment of a demilitarized zone.

5. On a consideration of these principles, the Six were of the view that it was not feasible to formulate one uniform proposal to apply to all sectors of the Sino-Indian boundary now in dispute.

6. On the Eastern Sector.

- (a) it seems to be clear that, whether the McMahon Line is considered to be an illegal imposition or not, it has in fact become a line of actual control, with the Chinese Government exercising exclusive administrative control to the north of it, and the Indian Government exercising exclusive administrative control to the south of it, except in Che Dong and Longju which are disputed ;
- (b) for purpose of a ceasefire, the Six considered that this line of actual control would be the most appropriate ;
- (c) if this line were to be adopted, the nature of the terrain would bring about an automatic disengagement of forces, so that the establishment of a demilitarized zone would become unnecessary ;
- (d) the Six considered that China and India should enter upon immediate negotiations in regard to the disputed portions of the Eastern Sector (*i.e.*, Che Dong and Longju), and that it might be appropriate if arrangements similar to Longju could be made in respect of Che Dong pending a final settlement.

7. In the Middle Sector, the Six considered that, inasmuch as there have been no military operations in this sector, and inasmuch as the line of actual control is not in dispute, except at one place (Wuje or Barahoti), it would be appropriate if, pending a final settlement of overall boundary question,

- (a) both sides desisted from military actions ;
- (b) both sides respect the *status quo*.



8. In formulating proposals for a ceasefire on the Western Sector, the Six bore in mind the following factual considerations :—

- (a) that China and India are not agreed as to what is meant by “the line of actual control as of 7th November 1959;”
- (b) that India exercised exclusive administrative control to the west of what the Chinese claim to be the traditional customary line, and, prior to 1959, may have sent out patrols to the east of that line from time to time ;
- (c) that between 1959 and 1962, India has established 43 military checkpoints to the east of what the Chinese have described as the traditional customary line ;
- (d) that prior to 1959, the Chinese held somewhere to the east of the traditional customary line as claimed by them ;
- (e) that between 1959 and 1962, the Chinese also have established some military posts westward but to the east of what China claims as the traditional customary line ;
- (f) that the Chinese reached what they claimed to be the traditional customary line in 1962 as the result of their recent military actions ;
- (g) that the area to the east of what the Chinese claim as the traditional customary line is uninhabited so that civilian administrative control in the strict sense of that term would not have been possible by either side ;
- (h) that at the date of the unilateral ceasefire declared by the Chinese, the Chinese and Indian military forces were confronting each other more or less along the traditional customary line claimed by China ;

9. Bearing these considerations in mind, the Six propose as a basis for a ceasefire :—

- (a) that Chinese forces should carry out the withdrawal proposed by Prime Minister Chou En-lai on November 21, 1962, on the Western Sector ;
- (b) that Indian forces should remain where they are *i.e.*, on the traditional customary line as claimed by China ;
- (c) that the area in between should be demilitarized pending a final settlement of the border dispute ;
- (d) that the demilitarized zone should be so administered as not to exclude the presence of either India or China as hitherto, pending a final settlement of the border dispute ;
- (e) that pending a final settlement of the border dispute, this zone should be so administered as to exclude the presence of military forces of both sides. It is therefore proposed that this zone should be administered by civilian posts to be agreed upon by both sides.

*Clarification given by the Representatives of the Colombo Powers to the Government of India on 13th January 1963.*

Upon request from the Government of India, the following



clarifications of paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of the Colombo Conference proposals were given by the delegations of Ceylon, U.A.R. and Ghana:

*Western Sector*

(i) The withdrawal of Chinese forces proposed by the Colombo Conference will be 20 kilometres as proposed by Prime Minister Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru in the statement of the Chinese Government dated 21st November and in Prime Minister Chou En-lai's letter of 28th November 1962, *i.e.*, from the line of actual control between the two sides as of November 7, 1959, as defined in maps III and V circulated by the Government of China.

(ii) The existing military posts which the forces of the Government of India will keep to will be on and up to the line indicated in (i) above.

(iii) The demilitarized zone of 20 kilometres created by Chinese military withdrawals will be administered by Civilian posts of both sides. This is a substantive part of the Colombo Conference proposals. It is as to the location, the number of posts and their composition that there has to be an agreement between the two Governments of India and China.

*Eastern Sector*

The Indian forces can, in accordance with the Colombo Conference proposals, move right up to the south of the line of actual control, *i.e.*, the McMahon Line, except for the two areas on which there is difference of opinion between the Governments of India and China. The Chinese forces similarly can move right up to the north of the McMahon Line except for these two areas. The two areas referred to as the remaining areas in the Colombo Conference proposals, arrangements in regard to which are to be settled between the Governments of India and China, according to the Colombo Conference proposals, are Che Dong or the Thagla Ridge area and the Longju area, in which cases there is a difference of opinion as to the line of actual control between the two Governments.

*Middle Sector*

The Colombo Conference desired that the *status quo* in this sector should be maintained and neither side should do anything to disturb the *status quo*.